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Boundaries shown on this map are those of the Republic of Belarus, and do not include the entire Belarusian ethnic territory parts of which extend into neighboring states.

EDITOR'S DESK

Yugoslavia Lesson For Belarusian Opposition

To all appearances, President Slobodan Milosevic of Yugoslavia and President Alaksandr Łukašenka of Belarus are two birds of a feather, as the saying goes. Both are dedicated autocrats, both have extended their tenure through manipulation and both will use any and all means to retain their power. Both rely on the military and police to stay in power and both are relentless in suppressing free media and the opposition.

Until recent past, the opposition in both countries also had many things in common: no clearly defined common goal, too many groupings ("parties") with too many chiefs and too few Indians, continuous infighting among themselves, and self-inflicted weaknesses. Judging by the outcome of the September 24 elections, the opposition in Yugoslavia finally has learned its lesson, though not completely.

With 18 Serbian opposition parties united behind one presidential candidate, the opposition claims to have won the election outright with more than 50 percent of the vote. Even official figures show Milosevic to be behind by more than ten percentage points. But Mr. Milosevic has shown no signs of wanting to go. The government-appointed electoral commission maintains that the opposition scored less than 50 percent and has announced a second-round runoff to be held October 8. Opposition members have accused the government of fraud. As of this writing (Oct. 2), the opposition presidential candidate, Vojislav Kostunica, announced he would boycott the second round and force Milosevic out by resorting to massive street demonstrations and nationwide strikes. Milosevic, on other hand, counts on a second round and hopes to win by default. While the West is calling for Milosevic to go, Russia has taken the position that Yugoslavs should "decide for themselves" the outcome of the election.

According to reports, the opposition candidates also won in the municipal elections but lost in the parliamentary ones. Why lost? Because the independence-minded Montenegro, the other republic which makes up Yugoslavia, chose to boycott the parliamentary elections. And so, even if Milosevic goes, his majority in parliament will make the life of the new president pretty uncomfortable.

Now, let's go back to the situation in Belarus. Belarus is scheduled to have its elections to the lower house of National Assembly on October 15. The opposition considers the assembly as an unconstitutional institution, an outgrowth of the fraudulent 1996 referendum. However, it decided to go along with the elections, provided the government agrees to four criteria proposed by the OSCE. These criteria — aimed at guaranteeing free and fair democratic elections — are: respect for human rights and an end to the climate of fear; opposition access to the state media; a democratic electoral code; and the granting of real power to the parliament that will be chosen in these elections.

Łukašenka reportedly agreed to these criteria. But he has stalled with the implementation, offering insignificant "concessions" very late in the game. Many observers have concluded that the government has not made real progress in fulfilling the four criteria for international recognition of the elections.

And the democratic opposition, feeling it had no time for organizing a viable election campaign, decided to boycott the elections. The OSCE, the U.S. and European government institutions have said they are not going to send their election observers to Belarus but will send instead a "technical mission." With much confusion around, some members of the "united" democratic opposition broke ranks and decided to run. So much for unity.

Lately, the Łukašenka regime has launched a campaign of intensified harassment directed against members of the opposition. The government-controlled television, especially "Panorama," has unleashed a series of newscasts featuring hateful diatribes disparaging the opposition figures.

With the parliamentary elections written off, the opposition is counting on the presidential election due in 2001. This date provides for the extension of Łukašenka's tenure by two years and is mandated by the fraudulent 1996 referendum, which both the West and Belarusian democratic opposition consider illegal.

Commenting on the Yugoslav elections, Vincuk Viačorka, head of the Belarusian Popular Front, is quoted as saying that Lukashenka will find himself the only black hole on the body of Central and Eastern Europe. "Victory over Milosevic . . . proves that our tactics of unity is right, that we need to fight for real power at the presidential elections, that it is necessary to compromise and agree upon a single democratic candidate and launch an effective campaign three months prior to the ballot."

Well, good luck! We will keep our fingers crossed. We are certain Łukašenka will use every trick in the book to prolong his hold on power. Some observers believe that recent personnel changes in security-sensitive positions indicate Łukašenka is reinforcing the "Russian factor" within his inner circle.

Belarus had — but has missed — a fair chance to build an independent, sovereign, democratic country after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. With the advent of Łukašenka, those chances have been diminishing with every year. We hope the opposition takes a long and good look at the Yugoslav elections and consolidate their forces, expand their base, develop a workable plan, stay united, and not wait to start their presidential campaign till just three month before the balloting but do it much sooner.

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Joe Price
Editor

FEATURES

Two National Anniversaries in Belarus: 10th Anniversary of Sovereignty Declaration and 9th Anniversary of Independence Declaration

By Art Turevich

With Gorbachev's *perestroika* in full swing, the Belarusian parliament declared sovereignty of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic on July 27, 1990 (see below). A year later, on August 25, 1991, under the prodding of Belarusian Popular Front's deputies, the parliament, at its extraordinary session, passed a law to incorporates the Declaration of Sovereignty into the republic's constitution and at the same time declared Belarus' independence from the Soviet Union. The next month, on September 19, it adopted a new name for the country — the Republic of Belarus, and new national symbols: a white-red-white flag and the coat of arms — *Pahonia* or Pursuit. The intent of the name change was to go native by removing the *russia* part from the country's name and thus dissociate Belarus from Russia.

The July 27 date was marked officially as a national Independence Day until Łukašenka assumed his dictatorial powers in 1996. After the November 1996 referendum, the national Independence Day was replaced by the Day of Republic to be observed on July 3, the day when Soviet troops liberated Miensk from the Nazis in 1944. Earlier, after the May 1995 referendum, Łukašenka replaced the national symbols — the flag and the coat of arms — with the ones from the Soviet era. The observance of the 25th of March, the day of the proclamation of the Belarusian National Republic in 1918, and the 27th of July as national independence days, as well as the use of the old national symbols, were declared illegal by the Łukašenka government.

Some opposition groups, especially the Belarusian Popular Front, have continued to mark those holidays in defiance of the Łukašenka regime. In such cases, the participants are being treated as lawbreakers. This year, on July 27, opposition activists marked the 10th anniversary by holding demonstrators, rallies, concerts and picketing. A group of activists of Malady Front (Young Front), a youth NGO, marched through the downtown Miensk, making stops near public buildings for picketing. In the evening, a rock concert was organized at the outskirts of Miensk. In Mahilou , about one hundred marched through the city center, waving white-red-white flags. No incidents with the police were reported.

The authorities banned demonstrations in Brest, Baranavičy, Maladečna, Biaroza, Pinsk and Homiel where, in some instances, demonstrators were detained by police and some sent to jail.

White House Statement

On July 27, the United States marked the 10th anniversary of Belarus' declaration of sovereignty from the Soviet Union by releasing the following White House Press Secretary's statement:

July 27 marks the tenth anniversary of the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Belarus by the Belarusian Supreme Council. This historic act was an important step toward the establishment of an independent and democratic Belarusian state and a clear expression of the will of the Belarusian people.

Ten years later, however, much remains to be done to realize the dream of a democratic and independent Belarus in which the rights of all citizens are respected, and which is part of the international and Euroatlantic community. The United States firmly supports the people of Belarus in their desire to achieve these goals and calls on the Belarusian authorities to take all necessary steps to hold free and fair elections, beginning with parliamentary elections this fall.

In this regard, the United States also calls on the Belarusian authorities to fulfill promptly the four conditions set out by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe as a basis for sending international observers to the parliamentary elections. These conditions include: respect for human rights and

an end to the climate of fear; access to the state media for the democratic opposition; creation of a democratic electoral code; and granting real power to the parliament to be elected. A thorough investigation and accounting of those who have disappeared is also critical.

We know that the spirit of the Declaration of State Sovereignty is alive among the people of Belarus. On this anniversary, they should know that they have the support of the people and the Government of the United States.

Declaration of State Sovereignty

Following is the text of the Declaration of Sovereignty adopted by the Supreme Soviet of the BSSR on June 27, 1990:

The Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic

- expressing the will of the people of the Byelorussian SSR, aware of its responsibility for the destiny of the Byelorussian nation,
- reaffirming its respect for the dignity and the rights of the people of all nationalities residing in the Byelorussian SSR,
- expressing its respect for the sovereign rights of all the peoples of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics and of the world,
- considering the republic a full and independent member of the world community,
- acting in conformity with the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other universally recognized international legal instruments,
- hereby solemnly proclaims the full state sovereignty of the Byelorussian SSR as the supremacy, the independence and the absolute state power of the Republic within its territory, the competence of its laws, the independence of the Republic in foreign relations, and declares its determination to establish a state, based on law.

Article 1

The Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic is a sovereign state established on the basis of the realization by the Byelorussian nation of its inalienable right to self-determination, state-language status of the Byelorussian language, and the supremacy of the people in the determination of its destiny. The inalienable rights of the Byelorussian SSR as a sovereign state shall be realized in conformity with the universally recognized norms of international law. The Byelorussian SSR shall safeguard and protect the right of the Byelorussian people to have its own state. The Byelorussian SSR shall have its own emblem, flag and anthem. Any forcible acts against the national statehood of the Byelorussian SSR committed by political parties, public associations or individuals shall be punishable by law.

Article 2

The citizens of the Byelorussian SSR of all nationalities constitute the Byelorussian people, which shall be endowed with the sovereignty and shall be the sole source of power in the Republic. The sovereignty of the people shall be realized both directly and through representative organs of state power. The right to act in the name of all the people of the Republic shall be vested exclusively in the Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian SSR.

Article 3

The state sovereignty of the Byelorussian SSR shall be proclaimed in the name of the supreme goal - free development and prosperity, a dignified life for every citizen of the Republic on the basis of ensuring human rights of the individual in conformity with the Constitution of the Byelorussian SSR and its international obligations.

Article 4

Citizenship of the Byelorussian SSR shall be an integral part of its sovereignty. The Republic shall protect the honor, the health and the legal interests of its citizens, and shall ensure their social protection. They shall enjoy protection of the Byelorussian SSR outside its territory. The Republic may confer and terminate citizenship.

Article 5

The land, its mineral wealth, the other natural resources on the territory of the Byelorussian SSR, and its air space shall be the property of the Byelorussian people which shall have the exclusive rights of their possession, enjoyment and disposal. The determination of the legal status of all kinds of property shall be within the exclusive competence of the Byelorussian SSR. The Byelorussian SSR shall have the right to its portion of the all-Union property according to the contribution of the Byelorussian people and, as a founding Republic of the Soviet Union having legal capacity, shall have the right to its portion of the diamond, currency, and gold reserves of the USSR. The Byelorussian SSR shall establish the National Bank, accountable to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic, shall organize its financial and credit system, shall confirm the right of ownership of specialized banks based on its territory at the time of the adoption of this Declaration, shall organize its own taxation and customs services, and shall have the right to establish its own monetary system.

Article 6

The territory of the Byelorussian SSR shall be indivisible and inviolable and shall not be altered or used without the consent of the Byelorussian SSR. All questions concerning borders shall be decided only on the basis of the mutual consent of the Byelorussian SSR and the adjacent sovereign states by the conclusion of appropriate agreements, subject to ratification by the Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian SSR.

Article 7

Within the territory of the Byelorussian SSR the Constitution of the Byelorussian SSR and the laws of the Byelorussian SSR shall have supremacy. All citizens and stateless persons, state organs, enterprises, institutions and organizations based or functioning on the territory of the Byelorussian SSR shall obey the laws of the Byelorussian SSR. The delimitation of legislative, executive, and judicial power shall be the most important principle of the functioning of the Byelorussian SSR as a state, based on law. The supreme supervision over the strict and uniform observance of the laws shall be exercised by Procurator-General appointed by the Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian SSR.

Article 8

The Byelorussian SSR shall independently establish a procedure for organizing nature preservation, utilization of natural resources of the territory of the Republic and shall ensure ecological security for the people of the Republic. The Byelorussian SSR shall have the right to compensation for the damage incurred as a result of activities of all-Union organs, Union republics, and other states. The Byelorussian SSR demands from the Government of the USSR an unconditional and prompt compensation for the damage connected with the elimination of the effects of the Chernobyl disaster. The Byelorussian SSR shall use its freedom and sovereignty first and foremost to save the people of the Byelorussian SSR from the effects of the Chernobyl disaster.

Article 9

The Byelorussian SSR shall be independent in deciding on the questions of culture and spiritual development of the Byelorussian nation, other national communities of the Republic, and in organizing its own system of information, education, and upbringing. The Byelorussian SSR shall ensure functioning of the Byelorussian language in all spheres of social life, and the preservation of national traditions and historical symbols. National, cultural, and historical values on the territory of the Byelorussian SSR shall be the exclusive property of the Republic and its citizens.

Article 10

The Byelorussian SSR shall have the right to its own armed forces, internal security forces, organs of state and public security, which shall be controlled by the Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian SSR. The Byelorussian SSR shall have the sovereign right to determine for its citizens the procedure and conditions of military service, and service in the organs of state and public security, and to decide on the questions of deployment of troops and armaments on its territory. No military units, military bases or installations of other countries shall be deployed on the territory of the Byelorussian SSR without the consent of its Supreme Soviet. The Byelorussian SSR sets the aim to make its territory a nuclear-free zone and to become a neutral state.

Article 11
The Byelorussian SSR shall independently exercise the right to enter into voluntary unions with other states and to withdraw freely from these unions. The Byelorussian SSR proposes to commence immediately the elaboration of an agreement on an union of sovereign socialist states.

Article 12
The provisions of the present Declaration shall be implemented by the Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian SSR through the adoption of a new Constitution (Fundamental Law) of the Byelorussian SSR, and laws of the Byelorussian SSR.

Editor's Note: *The new constitution was adopted on March 15, 1994 by a democratically elected Supreme Soviet. Lukašenka replaced this constitution by his own in 1996 by means of a fraudulent referendum. Most Western countries still recognize the 1994 constitution.*

No 'International Observers' for Belarus Elections?

By Art Turevich

According to the August 30 decision of the Vienna OSCE technical conference, the European political parties will not send their observers to Belarus. The following political institutions were represented at the conference: the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), Parliamentary Assemblies of the Council of Europe and the OSCE, the Parliamentary Troika of the European Union, CIS (Council of Independent States) and CIS Interparliamentary Assembly. The Belarusian democratic opposition was represented by Supreme Soviet Vice-Speaker Anatoly Lebedko and Belarusian Popular Front Chair Vintsuk Vyachorka. Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Martynov represented the government of Belarus.

It was the first time that he CIS and CIS Interparliamentary Assembly representatives participated in the conference. The presence of Russians has greatly strengthened the hand of the official Minsk. But even the Russians, in the opinion of the Belarusian opposition delegates, failed to persuade the Europeans to send a mission of international observers to Belarus.

In its concluding remarks (see below), the conference does not mention "international observation" at all. Instead, the conference ruled to send an ODIHR (Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) mission to Minsk to make a "technical assessment " of the October elections.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS STATEMENT
by the Third Technical Conference on Belarus 30 August 2000

The Third Technical Conference reviewed the conditions for democratic parliamentary elections in Belarus and received reports from the Government of Belarus and from representatives of the Advisory Council and other opposition parties. In light of these statements and on the basis of the assessments made by the OSCE-AMG, the Parliamentary Troika and the ODIHR, the following recommendations for the participating institutions were adopted:

1. Concerted international endeavors — in particular by the OSCE-AMG, the Parliamentary Troika of the European Parliament, and the Parliamentary Assemblies of the Council of Europe and the OSCE, the CIS, the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS, and specific initiatives by the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union, by the Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE, and by separate visits of Political Directors of the European Union and of the OSCE underline the continued political interest in assisting Belarus to rejoin democracies in Europe.

2. Progress has been made in the four major field relating to the organization of democratic elections that constituted the main topics of international consultation, but this still falls short of the internationally agreed criteria.

3. Whilst the legal framework for the elections have been improved, the other framework guidelines — access to the media, functions of parliament, peace period as discussed in the Position Paper of the Technical Conferences dated May 21, 2000 have not so far been changed to the extent that overall conditions could at this point be qualified as satisfactory.

4. However, the changes to the framework for the parliamentary election to justify a technical assessment mission to be organized and deployed by ODIHR in close cooperation with AMG.

5. The ODIHR technical assessment mission will include the deployment of election experts for a period of around four weeks.

6. In light of the experience and respect that representatives of the Parliamentary Assemblies of the OSCE and the Council of Europe, and the European Parliament — acting as the Parliamentary Troika — have gained in the past due to their political involvement in the democratization process, the Conference has invited them to continue their consultative and monitoring functions on the occasion of the forthcoming parliamentary elections. The Parliamentary Troika should also act as observers in their institutional capacity to the extent which enables them to make an objective assessment of the election process. It will closely coordinate with the OSCE-AMG, ODIHR and with domestic observers.

7. The Conference invites the Parliamentary Troika, the ODIHR and the OSCE-AMG to evaluate the conduct of the elections and subsequent developments, in particular with regard to the functions of the new parliament, the respect for human rights, and the strengthening of the rule of law.

8. The presence of the Parliamentary Troika and the ODIHR limited technical assessment mission emphasizes the political significance that Europe attaches to the development and consolidation of democracy in Belarus. Their presence in Belarus on the occasion of the parliamentary elections does not constitute an act of international recognition of the democratic character and outcome of the parliamentary election process.

9. This recommendation is guided by the conviction that the constitutional controversy that arose in November 1996 can only be overcome by peaceful means, negotiations and democratic elections.

10. The recommendations may be reviewed in the case of improvement or deterioration of the situation in Belarus.

11. The delegation of CIS and the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS do not associate themselves with paragraph eight (8).

(*Source*: Charter 97, August 31, 2000)

U.S. Senators Voice Concern about Disappearances and Fear in Belarus

Senator Jesse Helms on Disappearances in Belarus

Following is Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms's statement to mark the one year anniversary of the disappearance of Belarusian opposition leaders Victor Gonchar and Anatoly Krasovsky:

This past Saturday, September 16, marked the passage of twelve months since the disappearance of Victor Gonchar and Anatoly Krasovsky, two prominent members of the democratic opposition in Belarus. These freedom fighters have not been heard from since President Lukashenko, in a drooling rage on Belarusian television, publicly ordered his state security services to crack down "on the opposition scum."

The disappearance of Gonchar and Krasovsky were preceded by the disappearance of former Interior Minister-turned opposition leader, General Yuri Zakharenko. And this summer, Belarus was shocked by the disappearance of Dimitry Zavadsky, a journalist known for his critical reporting on the Lukashenko regime.

This anniversary is a sad reminder that democracy and freedom still cannot be taken for granted in the whole of Europe. In a region of consolidated and emerging democracies, Belarus, under the fanatical dictatorship of Alexander Lukashenko, has instead emerged as a throwback to Soviet repression, censorship, and command economy.

The pain and suffering of the children, wives, and loved ones of Gonchar, Krasovsky, Zakharenko, and Zavadsky are tragically reminiscent of the pain and suffering endured by the families of those who disappeared in the killings of innocent Belarusians at Kuropaty -- killings from an era whose cruelest vestiges are today being reanimated by Lukashenko.

The families of Gonchar, Krasovsky, Zakharenko, Zavadsky and others who suffer in Belarus because of their commitment to freedom are in our thoughts and prayers. Tomorrow's dark anniversary should remind us all of the moral imperative of supporting those struggling to bring democracy and freedom to Belarus.

Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell on Climate of Fear in Belarus

Following is a statement by Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell, Co-chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission), made in the U.S. Senate on September 28, 2000.

Mr. President, as Co-Chairman of the Helsinki Commission, I take this opportunity to update my colleagues on the situation in Belarus, as I have done on previous occasions.

The Belarusian parliamentary elections are scheduled for October 15, and unfortunately, they do not meet the basic commitments outlined by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) concerning free and democratic elections. Moreover, many observers have concluded that the Belarusian government has not made real progress in fulfilling four criteria for international observation of the elections: respect for human rights and an end to the climate of fear; opposition access to the state media; a democratic electoral code; and the granting of real power to the parliament that will be chosen in these elections.

Instead, the Helsinki Commission has observed that the Lukashenka regime launched a campaign of intensified harassment in recent days directed against members of the opposition. We have received reports that just last week, Anatoly Lebedka, leader of the United Civic Party, whom many of my colleagues met when he visited the Senate last year, was roughed up by police after attending an observance marking the first anniversary of the disappearance of a leading member of the democratic opposition Viktor Gonchar and his associate, Anatoly Krasovsky. And just a few days ago, we were informed that Belarusian Popular Front leader Vintsuk Viachorka's request for air time on Belarusian television to explain why the opposition is boycotting the parliamentary elections was met with a hateful, disparaging diatribe on the main newscast "Panorama."

This is only the tip of the iceberg - in addition, the Helsinki Commission is receiving reports of detentions, fines and instances of beatings of opposition activists who are promoting a boycott of the elections by distributing leaflets or other literature or holding meetings with voters. In recent weeks, we have also been informed of the refusal to register many opposition candidates on dubious grounds; the seizure of over 100,000 copies of the independent trade union newspaper "Rabochy"; forceful disruptions of public meetings with representatives of the opposition; an apparent burglary of the headquarters of the Social Democratic Party; a ban of the First Festival of Independent Press in Vitebsk, and recent "reminder letters" by the State Committee on Press for independent newspapers to re-register.

Mr. President, Belarusian opposition parties supporting the boycott have received permission to stage "Freedom March III" this Sunday, October 1. At a number of past demonstrations, police have detained, harassed and beaten participants. Those in Congress who are following developments in Belarus are hopeful that this demonstration will take place peacefully, that authorities do not limit the rights of Belarusian citizens to freedom of association and assembly, and that the Government of Belarus will refrain from acts of repression against the opposition and others who openly advocate for a boycott of these elections.

Mr. President, the Helsinki Commission continues to monitor closely the events surrounding these elections and we will keep the full Senate apprized of developments in the ongoing struggle for democracy in Belarus.

THOUGHTS and OBSERVATIONS

Russia-Belarus Union — Or 'Bardak'?

Belarusan President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and his closest Russian allies are seething in the wake of the August 30 session of the Council of Ministers of the Russia-Belarus Union State. Held in Moscow and chaired by Russia's Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, the session demonstrated the inability of an impoverished and chaotic Russia to organize the economic bailout of Belarus. The Russian Pavel Borodin, state secretary of the Russia-Belarus union state, went so far as to use the term "bardak"--a semi-obscene, popular Russian usage denoting "total mess"--at a postmortem briefing in Moscow. The embittered Borodin even questioned the strides made on military cooperation; on that point he was corrected by a Russian official present.

With senior members of the Russia-Belarus Parliamentary Assembly attending, the common Council of Ministers determined that the union state's budget has actually received only 21 percent of the funds originally approved for the first eight months of this year; and "not a kopek" in August. The programs to create a "Union television set" and to co-produce diesel engines have received only 10 percent and 2 percent, respectively, of the "union" funds originally budgeted for January-August 2000. Those are Minsk's top priorities, intended to rescue the rusting flagships of Soviet-era industry in

Belarus. There is no money, either, for another pet program of Lukashenka's--the creation of a "union" television channel to propagandize the union and at least partly offset the negative coverage of the situation in Belarus by Russian television channels.

Russia and Belarus are supposed to contribute 65 percent and 35 percent, respectively, of the union budget. That ratio obviously favors Russia and Lukashenka expects Moscow to correct that imbalance by coming up with additional funds. At the Moscow session, the Belarusans complained that the Russian partners had met only a small part of their obligations to the union budget thus far, but the Russians countered that the Belarusan partners had done no better. The common Council of Ministers was unable to take any corrective decision with regard to the remaining months of the year= .

Lukashenka had, before the session, insisted on tangible progress toward introducing a common Russian-Belarusan currency, preparatory to the creation of a single currency. With the Belarusan ruble rapidly depreciating, Lukashenka wants Moscow, in effect, to assume the burden of deficit-financing the Belarusan economy. The Russian side, however, rejected this approach out of hand at the Moscow session. It only agreed on a timeframe for introducing a common currency by 2005 and a single currency by 2008--targets too distant for any practical relevance.

As a vague silver lining for Minsk, the Russians agreed in principle to provide two loans for stabilizing the Belarusan ruble. Their value is US$200 million and 4.5 billion Russian rubles, respectively. But this is only a draft agreement, subject to approval at various levels in Russia and to fulfillment of as yet undisclosed financial conditions by Minsk. Ultimate approval and disbursement of these loans appears doubtful.

Diehard supporters of the union in both delegations called for revising the December 1999 treaty--signed by Presidents Boris Yeltsin and Lukashenka--which created the union state. These officials and parliamentary deputies complained that the treaty's provisions are too vague and insufficiently binding. "It enshrines talk about the union, rather than a mechanism for building the union," according to Vladimir Aksyonov, executive secretary of the union state's parliamentary assembly. Several assembly members, attending the Moscow session, called for a special session of the assembly this autumn to "impart real substance" to the treaty. Lukashenka had argued all along that the treaty had not gone far enough.

Apart from financial straits, it is "lack of political will in Moscow" which the Belarusan representatives consider responsible for the union's impasse. Under the December 1999 arrangements, the union's council of ministers was supposed to create a standing committee; and the executive secretariat under Borodin was supposed to be given substantial powers and a 300-strong staff. But none of this has been done, prompting Lukashenka to gripe that Borodin is being prevented from accomplishing his mission, and Aksyonov to insist that "we must have a union bureaucracy, one that would mature and stand on its own feet."

In Minsk, Lukashenka used the visit of Gennady Zyuganov, leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, to vent his angry disappointment with the Russian government. "We see an unprecedented regress of the union. The men, who used to impede its progress, have now begun actually to dismantle it." In lengthy remarks, broadcast live, Lukashenka portrayed Belarus as the most loyal of Russia's allies, and himself as the president most loyal to Russia among the CIS countries' leaders. He found it incomprehensible that Putin--whom he described as a "convinced supporter of the union with Belarus"--should fail to call to order the Russian officials who sabotage that union" (Itar-Tass, RIA, NTV, Belarusan Television, August 29-31, 2000)

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Avoiding Another Cordon Sanitaire

By Paul Goble

WASHINGTON, September 15, 2000 -- Moscow is now promoting the formation of the Russia-Belarus Union to prevent any linkup between the Baltic countries and the GUAM [Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova] states, a development that some officials in the Russian capital apparently fear could lead to the formation of another cordon sanitaire between Russia and Europe.

Boris Bikkinin, the head of the Russia-Belarus Union's security and defense commission, said on Thursday in Moscow that the merger of the two countries would considerably improve Russia's strategic situation in the western direction and break up any possibility of the formation of a new buffer zone between them and Europe.

Bikkinin said such a cordon sanitaire had already begun to "artificially develop" around Russia, and that the new union not only keeps the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania separate from the GUAM states of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova, but also creates a geo-strategic corridor for Russia to the West.

He added that the new union will also lead to the "rational resolution" of the problems of Kaliningrad, the noncontiguous part of the Russian Federation, and "ensure security on a major European crossroads."

Bikkinin's remarks are noteworthy in three respects. First, they suggest that Russian officials now view the union with Belarus as an essential element of the massive transit scheme the Russian cabinet approved on September 7. According to that scheme, Moscow must develop north-south and east-west transit routes in order to use its geographic location to promote its economic and political interests.

Both of these routes would require Russian access through Belarus, and the major east-west one would also need to use Belarusian territory to avoid having to transit Ukraine or the Baltic countries, something Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov said last week that Moscow was loathe to do because of the losses it was suffering by doing so now.

This economic calculation would appear to make it more likely that senior Russian officials will push harder for the consummation of the Russia-Belarus Union than they have in the past.

Second, Bikkinin's words suggest that at least some in Moscow think there is a real chance that the Baltic countries and the four GUAM states might in fact link up at some point in the future to Russia's detriment, and thus need to take preventive action now.

In fact, there have been both academic and diplomatic discussions about links between some members of each of the two groups. But to date, these have hardly reached the point that would appear to justify Bikkinin's sweeping charges.

Instead, his words appear to reflect a serious over-reading of cooperative efforts between and among both groups and a

perception that any links between them are part of an American or West European effort to isolate Moscow as Moscow had been isolated in the 1920s and 1930s.

And third, and most important, Bikkinin's reference to the cordon sanitaire policy of the interwar period points to a new theme in Russian foreign policy thinking. Last year and the year before, Russian foreign policy analysts followed former Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov in viewing the Russian Empire's post-Crimean War approach to the world as a model for Moscow's current and future behavior.

But now a Russian official has in effect suggested that Moscow should view the world as it did in the wake of the 1917 Russian revolution, a period during which the Western powers did try to create a buffer zone between the Soviet Union and the rest of the world.

During that period, Western countries and especially France and Poland sought to create north-south links from the Baltic countries to the Balkans and often talked about the ties between this region and the Caucasus, which was then under Soviet control.

By restoring this image, Bikkinin implies that at least some in the Russian capital may not only be more concerned about Russian isolation in this region than they have suggested in public. Moreover, it could mean that Moscow may be thinking about using some of the same kind of policies it used during that period when it was also relatively weakened by a period of revolutionary transformation.

If that proves to be the case, it could set the stage for more Russian pressure on both sets of countries, even as Moscow now believes it has an even better reason than before for a union with President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's authoritarian Belarus.

Paul Goble is Director of Communications and Technology, RFE/RL, and Publisher of the RFE/RL Newsline. Reprinted by permission of Paul Goble,

Anti-Moscow Turn in Lukashenka's Rhetoric

Belarusan President Alyaksandr Lukashenka is fostering a sense of isolation and national grievance against the outside world, in advance of next month's parliamentary elections. As part of pre-electoral tactics, Lukashenka is attempting to cast himself as the defender of national interests against what he portrays as predatory and overbearing countries all around Belarus. Increasingly, Lukashenka tends to include official Russia among those ill-wishers.

On an "working" inspection visit-cum-electoral swing last week in the Mahilyou Region — his early political base, and a favored territory with him ever since — Lukashenka declared: "I will agree to uniting [with Russia] only on equal terms. Until Russia recognizes that we should have equal rights in a union, I cannot agree to unite. To be stepson in a foreign state — that is not what you elected me for. You should understand this clearly, regardless of any attempts to speculate on the subject of Belarus-Russia relations. We stand for equality." (Belarusan TV, September 22).

Two days later, Lukashenka went on national television to accuse Russia of attempting to grab the lion's share of posts on "union state" bodies for Russian government representatives, so as to reduce the Belarusans to a minority in those joint bodies. Lukashenka demanded strict parity of Russian and Belarusan representatives (Belarusan TV, September 24). More to the point — -as Lukashenka himself went on to admit — those joint bodies have yet to be formed, funded and housed; the Russian government has not even allocated a building in Moscow for the "union state's" would-be Standing Committee. This particular failure Lukashenka blamed on the Kremlin itself.

Upping the ante in an interview for Russian television, recorded yesterday, Lukashenka warned: "Imperial positions must be kept out of the relations between Russia and Belarus. Such attitudes are harmful to Russia itself. Only equality of rights can eventually guarantee a viable union." Local observers could not remember any previous imputation of "imperial positions" to official Russia by Lukashenka. In the same interview, the president complained that officials in Moscow have their ways of "humiliating the Belarusan officials."

With calculated ambiguity, Lukashenka declared that "should the idea of Belarus-Russia unification sink, then one out of four components of the Belarusan president's policy will have sunk." He was referring to his four-point, 1994 electoral platform, one point of which had envisaged closest relations with Russia. The wording in yesterday's statement appears designed to put the importance of that goal in perspective and even downgrade it.

At the same time, Lukashenka's anti-Western rhetoric continues unabated. His pre-election speeches describe Western policies as inimical to both Belarus and Russia, the Belarusan opposition as instruments of the West, and even the Russian officialdom as infiltrated. "Just think how much the West paid out to those who concluded the Belavezha agreements [1991 acts on the dissolution of the Soviet Union]. Some of those involved continue to hold posts in Russia's governmental structures. . . Russian officialdom includes more than a few people with pro-Western inclinations," he warned. (Itar-Tass, September 26).

Lukashenka has always been unwilling to take practical steps toward political unification with Russia, inasmuch as the union would undermine his personal power in Belarus. He has in the past systematically blamed certain Moscow officials for blocking "economic unification," by which he understands Russian direct or indirect subsidization of the Belarusan state economy. But he has never attacked Moscow in the terms that he is now using.

This unprecedented rhetoric probably reflects Lukashenka's reading of public opinion trends in Belarus. The president is known to pay attention to those trends as reported to him by the intelligence services. As he prepares to stage elections next month, Lukashenka apparently recognizes that the idea of unification with Russia has steadily been losing popularity. The national-democratic opposition has recognized that trend long ago. His KGB (still so named) is now probably drawing Lukashenka's attention to that trend.

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BELARUS' FORUM

Pilgrimage of the Doomed

The Way is not kept at a distance from people. But the people keep themselves at a distance from the Way."

DZEN LESSONS

By Nikolai Khalezin

This year autumn began in spring. There was no summer in fact. Mass protests of the dissatisfied stood fresh in memory when the government offered them another way out of the deadlock — election into a strange institution,

called "the house of representatives," sometimes wrongly referred to as "the parliament." To follow this way was something like playing the Russian roulette with a gun loaded with seven bullets.

No Matter Who Votes, It Matters Who Counts

Elections have never been a success in our country. May be it were us who didn't know how to vote properly, or the ones who counted didn't know how to count well. Just as it had been the case with the workers of Soviet plants, who were supposed to produce combine harvesters but would always get an atomic bomb in the end. As a result of all previous ballots, the Belarusian Parliament had a red-brown face, crowned with a lilac nose of a drunkard.

In the days of Great Stagnation 99,9% of the Belarusian electorate visited the buffets at the polling stations, having absolutely no clue who they were voting for and into what institution. During the "perestroika" period a lot has changed, if not everything. We realized that we could elect worthy candidates, who would then defend our interests in practice. However, there had been the same people in charge of counting the votes as before. Consequently, all that parliamentarians cared about were their own interests.

One morning we woke up to find ourselves living in a presidential Republic. That was the only time when we honestly voted and honestly counted. Nevertheless, this became our greatest mistake in the contemporary history of Belarus. We voted for the possibility not to vote anymore. Of course, this is not to say that they abolished elections as such. But they no longer take our opinion into consideration.

Six years have passed since then. Six years, which the authorities stole from our lives. We arrived somewhere, where we had been long ago with an opportunity to drink sour beer in the buffets, eat crumpled oranges and cold chicken.

Boycott-2000

Half a year ago OSCE articulated four conditions, upon fulfilling which Lukashenko could expect the European structures to legitimize his parliament

- cease the harassment of dissidents and release the political prisoners;
- empower the parliament with real legislative authority;
- introduce amendments into the electoral code;
- ensure opposition's access to the state media;

After Alexander Lukashenko ignored these requirements, opposition's participation in the fall round of elections lost any point. Otherwise, Lukashenko could allow some 5-10 oppositionists to get the seats in the parliament and declare with Zimovsky's mouth that the population does not want opposition.

Back in the year 1996 we saw with our own eyes how the authorities conduct plebiscites — then, around 80% of Belarusians allegedly supported the idea that the local officials must be appointed rather than elected. Consequent sociological surveys demonstrated that around 80% of the people voted the other way round. Same story about Lukashenko's "shadow budget".

Today the government is seeking one thing — to hold parliamentary elections, recognized by the European structures. But given they keep to the rules and allow it — around 60% of the winners will be democrats. At least that's what the polls' results say. If this comes to happen the executive should better look for a gun with one bullet. That is the reason why Lukashenko offers the European structures to play political "hide-and-seek", which the Europeans will never be able to win, even if they know where their opponents sit.

In case the OSCE send their observers to the elections, their results will be recognized even if there occur certain violations. That's exactly the way it happened in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan ... If so, then we're in for one of the two follow-ups.

The first one: Lukashenko holds next year presidential elections in a traditional way, after which the population is told that the candidate from the dictatorship party won with 73% of the votes. **And another five years are gone ...**

The second: The legitimized parliament introduces amendments into the Constitution, empowering itself to elect the head of state, referring to the experience of the Czech Republic and other democratic states. **And the whole life is gone ...**

Anticipating this outcome, opposition took the only right decision — to boycott the elections, where they cannot elect.

A Squadron of Trojan Horses

Concerted position of the democratic forces bewildered the authorities, who, in order to create an illusion of opposition's involvement in the race, had to reveal all their secret supporters, carefully disguised as "democrats".

Some newspapers, including non-state ones, came up with the headings "Opposition takes part in the elections" and declared that opposition suffered a split among their ranks. Both presumptions correspond to the real state of affairs only in the imagination of editors of these periodicals.

Previously, the newspapers used to call Gaidukevich (LDPB) and Abramova ("Yabloko") "opposition". Quite soon, though, they realized that there's no way they can convince their readers that these fellows represent opposition forces. So they took out a more serious card — Belarusian Social-Democratic Party (NG).

The session of the Congress of democratic forces, held in the beginning of July this year, worked out a common platform of the united opposition — abstention from the elections, provided the authorities fall short of meeting the four OSCE standards. BSDP delegation, with their leader Nikolai Statkevich at the head, never argued with that. At present, one can surely state that Statkevich's party leaves the united opposition forces camp, rather than claim that opposition underwent some split. We can only guess what the true motives of Nikolai Statkevich were: either he had been persuaded to participate in the elections by the German ambassador and the head of the OSCE AMG, both of whom support Lukashenko as far as elections go; or Statkevich had been promised by his German partners that they would sponsor the run for him ...

Present-day elections will only deepen the crisis within Statkevich's party. Most of its members are convinced democrats and cannot tolerate the idea of participating in farcical ballot, nor do the want to become a puppet party. Thus, Nikolai Statkevich can lose his mandate as leader of social democrats long before time. In the party leadership there are people who are worthy to be elected in his stead — former Supreme Soviet speaker Mecheslav Grib, the party's deputy chair Alexei Korol and Supreme Soviet deputy Vladimir Nistuk.

Another person to participate in the elections into a "marionette" parliament is Mikhail Chigir. It's hard to say what circumstances influenced Mikhail Nikolaevich's decision to run the race. May be he wants to remind everyone that he hasn't left big politics yet or may be it was his wife, who convinced him to do so. It's not a secret that his spouse is in total control of his business. But the fact remains — Mikhail Chigir determined to reduce his former status of a country's premier to a deputy of an illegitimate parliament. Such a reduction of his political status entails sad consequences — in case Chigir decides to participate in the coming elections,

he will automatically be excluded from the list of next-year democratic forces' candidates for the presidency.

Our Power

To persuade people to participate in today's elections is analogous to selling them MMM bonds — you get a receipt but the money is gone. The present pseudo-parliament hasn't been recognized by the leading democracies of the planet. Moreover, it is unable to solve tasks inside the country. In order to change our life to the better **we need to win presidential elections.** And fortunately the united democratic forces realize this pretty well.

If the citizens of Belarus support the democratic forces and ignore the farcical elections — our chances to participate in fair presidential elections in the year 2001 will seriously increase. The present-day regime understands only the language of force. And we need to take out our last argument — the power of our unity. Unity in ignoring the electoral farce, at least.

[Charter '97, August 23, 2000; charter@charter97.org]

Betrayal or Pragmatism?

Tensions are increasing among the Belarusian opposition as the October 15 legislative elections draw near. On September 10, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service broadcast a discussion on the upcoming ballot between two prominent opponents of the Alyaksandr Lukashenka regime: former speaker of the Supreme Soviet Stanislau Shushkevich, now chairman of the Belarusian Social Democratic Assembly, and Uladzimir Nistsyuk, deputy chairman of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Popular Assembly). Shushkevich's party is boycotting the October 15 elections, while Nistsyuk's party have taken an ambivalent stand on the ballot: officially, it is not fielding any candidates but has allowed its leader Mikalay Statkevich and a dozen activists to run in the elections on an independent ticket. The discussion was moderated by Yury Drakakhrust of RFE/RL's Belarusian Service. Following are excerpts from that discussion:

Moderator: The discussions currently under way in Belarus about the participation in or boycott of the elections pertain to the status of a future parliament. In your opinion, will this body become a [mere] appendage to the presidential administration or a counterbalance to the presidential authority?

Shushkevich: ...Now we have the so-called constitution approved in the 1996 referendum. This constitution defines the functions of the parliament--the so-called parliament, the Chamber [of Representatives]. These functions are insignificant in terms of lawmaking. According to the constitution, the leader of the executive, our president, has more legislative powers than the whole parliament. Therefore, [the newly elected legislature] will be an appendage to the presidential administration. However, in order to avoid some further problems, [the authorities] are taking pains to have there such folks who will show no interest other than the desire to obtain state handouts.

Nistsyuk: I fully agree with Stanislau Stanislavavich regarding his assessment of the pseudo-elections to the Chamber of Representatives.... We are well aware that the chamber, if it continues to lean on the 1996 constitution, will remain powerless. But this is not the point. The point is that this chamber can be blocked in two ways. The first way is to boycott the elections, to prevent the chamber from being elected--but it will be very difficult to do this under current conditions. The second way is to take part in the elections and try to blow up [the chamber] from within.... One should take advantage of all opportunities. We realize that the October elections are only a trial of strength — last test before the presidential elections.... If we fail to create a significant foothold [for the opposition] before the presidential elections, there will be no use participating in them.

Shushkevich: I don't agree with this justification of those who have betrayed the common stance of the united opposition. In order to clarify who was striving for what, the opposition convened the Congress of Democratic Forces [in July]. The congress said: One should not participate in this farce, it is not a ballot. Those who did not obey that resolution have betrayed the forces united by the congress, have betrayed the union of opposition parties. Now, about whether it is possible to blow up [the Chamber of Representative] from within. It is impossible to blow up a garbage heap from within because it contains only garbage. Even if a gram of flammable material is put there, it is impossible to light it in such manure.... For what purpose are the so-called elections--this farce--being organized [by the authorities]? In order to stage a rehearsal for the sweeping falsification of the presidential elections. It is no secret to anybody that Lukashenka has no support. The state is collapsing, all indicators are going down. [Lukashenka needs] to test a huge repressive mechanism of falsification.... The honest opposition will not be in the Chamber of Representatives because it has not fielded a single candidate.... There may be only those who betrayed the common position of the opposition parties, which was approved by the Congress of Democratic Forces. Eight hundred votes were in favor of this position and only 16 votes against, mainly from those who are now participating in the elections, from the so-called oppositionists.

Nistsyuk: I think some political parties are becoming hysterical.... It's not very becoming for a politician with such huge experience as Stanislau Stanislavavich to use such words as "betrayers" or "dishonest [oppositionists]." It is necessary to treat one another with respect insofar as [our stance on the elections] was adopted by the party's congress. And our party is no smaller than the others, or less influential in the country and the world than the others. I think it is necessary to tolerate one another's opinions. Otherwise, we will hardly be different from Lukashenka, who does not tolerate any dissenters. I think it is necessary to take advantage of all possibilities because the boycott means fighting, confrontation. During the five-year confrontation, we [repeatedly] tried to get 100,000 people on to the streets in Minsk but succeeded in bringing together no more than 40,000. One can also say [this] about the presidential elections: Whoever chooses to participate in them will be a betrayer. They will also be held in accordance with the 1996 constitution, under the same circumstances in which the country is now. But everybody intends to participate in them. Why, then, are we to ignore this year's elections?

Shushkevich: The 13 people [from Nistsyuk's party], even if all of them are elected, will have no influence over the parliament. They will be sitting in the so-called parliament, they will be crowing [like roosters] there, but nobody will know anything about them....

Moderator: In the Supreme Soviet of the 12th convocation, which was headed by you [Shushkevich], the opposition numbered [only] 40 among the nearly 400 deputies, that is, 10 percent. The Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation also had some 10 percent of oppositionists. However, those opposition groups, to use your expression, Stanislau Stanislavavich, crowed over [the successful passage of the opposition-proposed bills] declaring Belarus's independence and banning the Communist Party, and they nearly impeached Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

Shushkevich: Excuse me. There was one big difference. The Supreme Soviet was a full-fledged [legislative] body. According to the constitution of the Belarusian SSR, [the Supreme Soviet] could consider any problem and its resolution on that problem was final. The Supreme Soviet also resolved to

broadcast its debates live on television. Everybody could view them. Therefore, it was not possible [for the then executive] to ignore public opinion. As for this parliament, it sits in some oval hall and nobody knows what they talk about there. [The deputies] have no access to the media. There's no comparison [between the Supreme Soviet and the Chamber of Representatives]. (RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report Vol. 2, No. 34, September 19, 2000)

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BELARUSIAN CULTURE

III International Congress of Belarusists

took place in Miensk on May 22-24. It was organized by the International Association of Belarusists (IAB), a non-governmental organization headed by the noted Belarusian scholar, Prof.. Adam Maldzis.

Activities of the Association concentrate on studies of the spiritual heritage of the Belarusian people and other ethnic groups, inhabiting Belarus, development of Belarusian culture and its dissemination in the world, establishing contacts with foreign scholars. The membership of the Association includes scholars from 24 countries and Belarus itself.

Since 1995 the Association has been publishing a monthly bulletin "Kantakty i dyjalohi". An English-language version of "K & D" is currently in the planning stages. To date over 50 issues of the bulletin have been mailed to 17 countries. Since its last congress in 1995, the Association organized over 20 scholarly conferences, symposiums and seminars. It published proceedings of these events and separate publications.

The main topic of the Congress was entitled "Belarus and the Slavic world; Belarus and non-Slavic countries; mutual enrichment of cultures".In addition, there was a discussion of topics such as "2000 years of Christianity" and "Holy Scriptures and Belarusian culture."

Organization of the Congress had to overcome many difficulties stemming from the change of political climate in Belarus; many scholars are afraid to travel to the totalitarian state of Belarus. There were also significant financing problems. Due to these factors the organizers of the Congress have decided to conduct its work in two sessions. The first one took place on May 22-24; the second one is scheduled for December 5-6. The topic of the winter session will be entitled "Belarusian culture in the dialogue of civilizations."

North American Association for Belarusian Studies

In 1991 the International Association of Belarusists (IAB/MAB) was established to promote international cooperation and dialogue between scholars with an interest in Belarus and to heighten awareness of Belarus and Belarusian studies within the academic community. Under the aegis of the IAB, national and regional associations have been created to further the goals of the organization within their respective countries. The North American Association for Belarusian Studies (NAABS) is the newest of these IAB affiliates, joining already existing affiliates in Belarus, Poland, Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria, Germany, France and Great Britain. NAABS is a nonprofit scholarly organization which promotes teaching, research and publication in all areas of Belarusian studies, including history, language, literature and the arts, sociology, anthropology, politics, economics and international relations. NAABS seeks to foster communication and interdisciplinary collaboration between scholars engaged in Belarusian studies by sponsoring conferences, panels and workshops at the regional, national and international levels. As acting President and Vice-President of NAABS, it gives us great pleasure to invite you to join NAABS and contribute to the growth of Belarusian studies in North America. NAABS will be having an organizational meeting at the AAASS convention in Denver this November, where we will hold elections for officers (President, Vice-President, Secretary-Treasurer, Newsletter Editor, and a five-member Executive Council), discuss and vote on a draft the Association's bylaws, and plan our future activities. We will also discuss the possibility of publishing a newsletter and the related issue of membership dues. The meeting has been scheduled for Session 11, Sunday, November 12, 10:15-12:15; Director's Row G. We encourage all those who have an interest in Belarusian studies and who will be in Denver for AAASS to take part in this meeting and to make their voices heard. If you would like to nominate yourself or a colleague for any leadership position in NAABS, please contact Curt Woolhiser, Acting President, or Maria Paula Survilla, Acting Vice- President (see contact information below) before October 30, 2000. Potential members of NAABS who will not be attending the AAASS convention but would like to participate in the elections may vote by absentee ballot. Current acting officers (terms expire on November 12) are:

President: Dr. Curt Woolhiser, Dept. of Slavic Languages, University of Texas (Field: Slavic Linguistics; Research interests: Belarusian historical linguistics, dialectology and sociolinguistics; language attitudes and language ideologies; language planning and policy)

Vice-President: Dr. Maria Paula Survilla, Dept. of Music, Wartburg College (Iowa) (Field: Ethnomusicology; Research interests: Belarusian traditional and urban music; music and national identity)

Secretary-Treasurer: position currently vacant
Newsletter Editor: position currently vacant

Acting Executive Council:
Dr. David Marples, Dept. of History, University of Alberta (Field: History; Research interests: History of Belarus (20th century emphasis); the impact of Chernobyl; health and social-demographic issues; contemporary Belarusian politics)
Dr. Zina Gimpelevich, Dept. of Slavic Languages, Waterloo University (Canada) (Field: Slavic Studies; Research interests: Belarusian language and literature; the works of Vasil Bykau)(+ 3 additional members to be elected at organizational meeting in November)

If you would be interested in joining NAABS, or would like any further information about our organization, please contact us. We would like to request that all potential members send us an e-mail or postcard listing their name, affiliation, and areas of interest (this information will be forwarded to AAASS in connection with our application for AAASS affiliate status; please note that AAASS requires that a significant percentage of affiliate members belong to AAASS). We would also like to take this opportunity to encourage you to join the International Association of Belarusists (IAB/MAB). For membership information, please contact Dr. Adam Mal'dzis at:

'Respublika Belarus' 220050 Minsk, vul.. Revaliucyjnaja, 15 Kamitet HA "MAB"

Tel..: 375 (017) 220 76 04 Fax: 375 (017) 220 93 50 E-mail: mab@lingvo.minsk.by

Belarus National University

Democratic intelligentsia of Belarus continues its fight for the creation of the Belarus National University. As we know, with few exceptions all higher education in Belarus is conducted today in Russian.

The Minister of Education, Mr. V. Stražaŭ has met with representatives of intelligentsia, who initiated the efforts to create the National University. He explained that the state lacks resources for such an institution, and that in general, it is not necessary, since Belarus already has a number of universities. According to him, the ministry of education plans to open Belarusian divisions in several present universities. Also, if the state decides to create a National University, in the minister's opinion, it will be sufficient to confer the status of such an institution to the present State Pedagogical University in Miensk. Instead of creating a solid foundation of Belarusian-language higher education, present authorities are offering the citizens a deceitful substitution which does not secure their right to a higher education in their native language .

Future of the "Free Stage" theater

Belarus' authorities are destroying one of the best known Belarusian dramatic theaters — the theater "Free Stage". The theater became known for its bold and independent attitudes and a deep feeling for the originality of the Belarusian culture. It is also known for its promotion of free creativity, in contrast to most other theaters whose creativity is dependent on government structures.

It became especially successful in staging Shakespeare's plays, presented in contemporary language, which alludes to the present political situation in Belarus. With its Shakespearean repertory, the "Free Stage" theater took part in the recent international festival in Edinburgh, Scotland.

In the authoritarian climate of today's Belarus the staging of Berthold Brecht's "Career of Arthur Hugh" was most topical. In general, the theater's performances enjoyed great success, and were often sold out.

As a result of this, the authorities at first forced the theater to give up its name "Free Stage", and then, on August 31 dismissed its director, **Valery Mazynski**. In his place the ministry of culture suggested another person— Valery Anisienka. However, the actors refuse to accept him and to work with him. If this conflict is not successfully resolved, the theater itself may be dissolved , which may be the aim of government structures. In this case, Belarus will be left with practically no Belarusian-language theaters, since most other theaters use the Russian language in their performances.

"Chagal Chagal" in Scotland

The Jakub Kołas Dramatic Theater of Viciebsk participated in the well-known International Dramatic Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland. It presented its new play "Chagal Chagal" about the youth of the world-famous artist Marc Chagall (born in Viciebsk). The play was performed from August 14th through August 19th and won the grand prix of the festival. Subsequently the Jakub Kołas Theater was invited to a yearlong performance tour in England.

Here are excerpts from the Edinburgh newspaper "Scotsman":

" 'Chagal Chagal' from Vitebsk in Belarus is a staggeringly beautiful show about the early life of the artist Marc Chagal, as he remembers it in his dying moments. Born in Vitebsk in 1887, Chagall was entirely shaped as an artist by the life of the city's Jewish community and by his love for the little city he never left in his imagination."

"Here, nine magnificent actors from the Yakub Kolas Dramatic Theatre recreate that life in a series of ten exquisite, tableau-like scenes that shimmer with respect for the world Chagall knew, and with sorrow for the horrors that were to sweep it away."

Marc Chagal Exhibition

An exhibition of works of Marc Chagall's works took place in July 2000 at the National Art Museum in Miensk. This was already the second exhibition of the outstanding artist in Belarus' capital. His descendants, Bela and Meret, helped to organize the event by making available works from their private collection. The exhibition was entitled "Dedication to Paris". It consisted of 39 works by Chagall, including the sketches of the ceiling decorations for the Paris opera, commissioned by the government of France in 1963, the lithographs from the "Parisian Series" of the 1950s, and also 5 large tapestries by the French artist Yvette Coqui Prince, based on motifs from Chagall's works and created under the personal supervision of the artist.

Belarusian writers go abroad

The well-known Belarusian writer **Śviatłana Aleksijevič** has departed from Belarus for two years— first to Italy, and then to France. She is the author of true-to life books on the war in Afghanistan and the Chernobyl tragedy.

This is the third Belarusian writer who does not feel free to work in his/her homeland and has decided to establish a temporary residence abroad. The renowned Belarusian writer, Vasil Bykaŭ, now lives in Germany . Uładzimier Niaklajeŭ, the president of the Association of Belarusian Writers, lives in Finland.

Henrych Wagner passed away

The well-known Belarusian composer **Henrych Wagner** passed away on July 15, 2000.

He represented the classic Belarusian symphony music. As a student in Warsaw conservatory , he was instructed by the outstanding Polish musicologist Zbigniew Drzewiacki , who educated 5 laureate prize winners in the field of Chopin's music.

Henrych Wagner was the author of symphony concerts for various instruments, and also of the opera "Path of Life", based on the novel by Vasil Bykaŭ "Pack of Wolves". This opera was also performed in the Moscow Bolshoi Theater.

"Light of the Homeland"

A new (governmental) civic organization — the association *"Sviatło Radzimy"* (Light of the Homeland) was created in Belarus. The designated object of its activity is to establish and maintain contacts with the Belarusian dispora.

However, a civic association with identical objectives has been successfully operating in Belarus for the last 10 years — the Association of Belarusians of the World *"Baćkaŭščyna"*. Present authorities of Belarus dislike the independent views of this organization, its defense of Belarus' independence, its opposition to Łukašenka's dictatorial regime. The new organization was created on initiative of state organs specifically to limit the functioning of *"Baćkaŭščyna"* and eventually to liquidate it.

The civic structure *"Light of the Homeland"* is headed by a government minister on affairs of religion and nationalities — Alaksandr Bilyk. Apparently the new organization is supposed to help the government in its attempt to create a positive image of the Belarusian dictatorship abroad, while using the Belarusian diaspora for this purpose. Most likely, the state will finance the new organization, possibly by introducing new legislation.

The creation of the *"Light of the Homeland"* represents the first step toward the liquidation of civic associations and subordination of the civic/secular sector to the interests of Łukašenka's regime.

Belarus' HALL of FAME

Łarysa Hienijuš
(August 9, 1910 — April 7, 1983)

The poetess Łarysa Hienijuš was the true symbol of the democratic movement in Belarus. Her life and fate was just as dramatic as the fate of her country in which there was no place for those who longed for freedom and a better future for the Belarusian people.



Łarysa Hienijuš

Łarysa Hienijuš was born and grew up in western Belarus which was a part of Poland in the years 1921-1939. In 1930s she left for Prague, Czechoslovakia to join her husband, a medical student at the Charles University. Here she published her first collection of poems "Ad rodnych niŭ" (From Native Fields). The main topic of her poetry was the love for her Belarusian homeland and her vision of its better future as a free and independent country.

In Prague, she was secretary to Vasil Zacharka, the president-in-exile of the Belarusian National Republic from 1928 to 1943. She kept the presidential archives, supported Belarusian emigres, political refugees and prisoners of war.

Due to her patriotic attitude she and her family attracted the attention of the Soviets who came to Prague with the Red Army at the end of World War II . Due to Soviet pressure, she and her husband were stripped of their Czechoslovak citizenship they acquired after World War II.

Eventually, in 1948 Łarysa Hienijuš and her husband were arrested by the Soviet secret service and sentenced to 25 years in the labor camps of northern Russia. They were forced to leave their son Jurka, who was reunited with his parents much later, as an adult. He lived in Poland and died a young man. Łarysa's parents as well as her brothers lost their lives, as victims of the Soviet regime.

Following the thaw of 1956, the Hienijuš family was released on parole, but never exonerated. She never accepted the Soviet citizenship.

After having survived Soviet labor camps, Łarysa and Janka Hienijuš lived in solitude in their native town of Zelva, under the constant and watchful surveillance by the KGB.

In her memoirs entitled *"Spoviedz"* (Confession) Łarysa Hienijuš described her difficult life and her struggle against the cruel and inhuman regime that crippled not only her own life, but also the fate of her homeland Belarus.

In 1999 the poetry and memoirs of Łarysa Hienijuš were not included in the curriculum of Belarusian schools.

* On August 28, 2000 the Slavonic Library with the Czech National Library, in cooperation with SKARYNA society of Prague, opened an exhibition honoring the 90th anniversary of birth of Łarysa Hienijuš.

During the opening ceremonies poetry and excerpts from Ms. Hienijuš's memoirs *"Spoviedz"* were read both in Belarusian and in Czech translation.

The exhibition, which was organized by Ms. Františka Sokolova of the Slavonic Library in Prague, was open to the public for the month of September, 2000.

* In Miensk, on August 9, 2000 the Belarusian Language Society organized an evening to mark the 90th birthday of Łarysa Hienijuš.

* In Zelva, more than 50 admirers of the poetry of Łarysa Hienijuš gathered to observe the anniversary of the poetess' birth.

After a religious service, those attending shared recollections about the poetess' life and lowered the white-red-white national flag to half-mast.

Alaksiej Maračkin

The well-known Belarusian artist Alaksiej Maračkin celebrated his 60th birthday. In his works the artist emphasizes the historical aspects of Belarus. He has portrayed significant events of Belarus' past by creating portraits of St. Kiryła of Turaŭ, Mikoła Husoŭski, St. Euphrosyne of Połacak, princess Rahnieda, Francišak Skaryna, Kastuś Kalinoŭski.

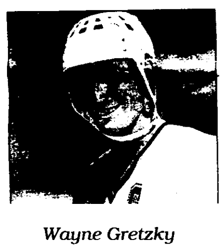
Mr. Maračkin is also the creator of the Holy Mother of God of Chernobyl. This painting is solemnly carried in the annual *"Čarnobylski Šlach"*(the Chernobyl Road) marches commemorating the victims of the Chernobyl disaster.

Mr. Maračkin is known in Belarus as an active participant of the movement for democracy. He is the president of the Association of Free Artists *"Pahonia"*. He has been a long-time member of the Belarusian Academy of Arts, where he has passed on his skills to many talented young people.

Mr. Maračkin now resides in Cleveland, Ohio (USA) where he has begun the design of murals for the newly-built Orthodox church in the Belarusian Community Center "Połacak".

Wayne Gretzky (Hrecki)

"If you ask any ice hockey fan who is the greatest hockey player of all times, one name comes up 90 percent of the time. Gretzky, nicknamed "The Great One" set more than 60 NHL scoring records during his 20-year career. During it, Gretzky's jersey bore the number 99. NHL retired this number, meaning that no other NHL player will ever wear it."



Wayne Gretzky

A product of Brantford, Ontario (Canada), Wayne Douglas Gretzky was born on January 26, 1961. In 1995 he was interviewed by a journalist for the Voice of America. Gretzky spoke about his family roots in Belarus, near the Polish border."

From "Belarus Today", August 1-7, 2000

Americans and Canadians of Belarusan origin Resolve to Defend Democracy in Belarus

On September 2, 2000, under the sunny skies of Strongsville, Ohio. the four-hundred-strong 24th Biennial Convention of Belarusan-Americans and Belarusan-Canadians was warmly welcomed by Mayor Walter F. Ehrnfelt. The mayor congratulated the Belarusan Christian Orthodox community on their newly built church and urged them to pass on Belarusan traditional values and language on to the younger generation. The governor of Ohio, Bob Taft, in his address to the Convention, conveyed greetings from presidential candidate George W. Bush and praised Belarusan-Americans for their contribution to the economy and cultural tapestry of the United States. The next day, after a religious service celebrated by Metropolitan Mikalaj and clergy of the Belarusan Autocephalic Orthodox Church, United States Senator George V. Voinovich was the recipient of the Third Belarusan-American Freedom Award. Senator Voinovich exhorted his audience to be aware of potential dangers that could come from the remnants of the Soviet dictatorial mentality and to continue working on behalf of a free and independent Belarus.

Other speakers at the convention included Ms. Ivonka Survilla, President of the Rada (Council) of the Belarusan Democratic Republic in Exile, Mr. Siamion Šarecki, Speaker of the 13th Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus (now in exile in Lithuania), and Mr. Zianon Paźniak, chairman of the Conservative Christian Party of the Belarusan Popular Front (now in exile in Poland). Written statements were also received from numerous local and federal officials.

The Convention was organized by the Belarusan American Association (BAA) and the Belarusan Canadian Alliance and was also sponsored by the Belarusan American Community Center "Polacak" and the Mother of God of Zyrovicy Belarusan Autocephalic Orthodox Church and chaired by Mr. Paul Wasilewski, chairman of the Cleveland chapter of BAA.

The Convention adopted the following resolution:

RESOLUTION

of the 24th Convention of Belarusans of North America
Cleveland. Ohio, September 3, 2000

WHEREAS Americans and Canadians of Belarusan origin are very concerned with the state of affairs in the country of their ancestry, Belarus, and desirous of contribution to the progress of democracy, independence and well-being of the Belarusan people; and

WHEREAS the political and economic situation in Belarus has been worsening in recent years because of the egregiously undemocratic policies of (now no longer legitimate) president Alaksandr Łukašenka; and

WHEREAS Łukašenka's dictatorial regime has been violating the constitutional foundation of the country and undermining the state sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus through a series of agreements with Moscow in order to satisfy Łukašenka's personal ambition to play a leading role in a larger Russian-Belarusan political arena; and

WHEREAS there have been a series of disappearances in Belarus of prominent opposition leaders (some of them alleged to be killed with the complicity of the government), thousands of unwarranted arrests and beatings of NGO and labor activists, countless show trials and imprisonment of opposition activists, and innumerable cases of violation of human rights of citizens; and

WHEREAS Łukašenka's government, with ethnic Russians holding key government positions, has been consistently conducting a policy of Russification by exclusive use of Russian in official business and discrimination against Belarusan national culture, Belarusan-language education and mass media; and

WHEREAS mediation by international representatives (e.g., OSCE, Council of Europe, European Parliamentary Assembly) on behalf of democracy, justice and fairness has brought no significant results (to a large degree because Moscow supports Łukašenka as its principal stooge in Belarus);

THEREFORE we, the participants in the 24th Convention of Belarusans of North America, resolve to:

CONTINUE working in defense of the Belarusan people's right to live in a democratic and independent Belarus;

EXPOSE the Łukašenka regime for what it really is — a dictatorship that threatens the security of Western Europe and the North Atlantic Community of Democracies by acting as a willing agent of Russian imperialism;

WORK toward consolidation of the democratic opposition to the Łukašenka regime both in Belarus and abroad;

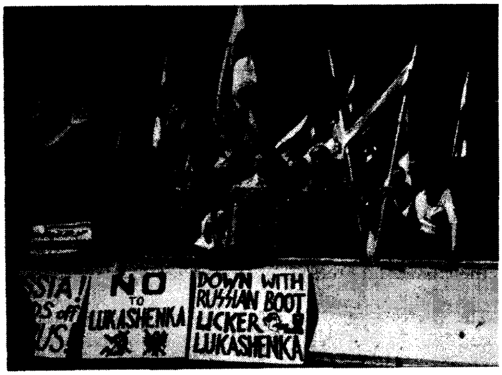
URGE American and Canadian authorities and business communities to exert more pressure on official Minsk to put an end to the persecution of defenders of democracy and national culture in Belarus as well as the cultures of national and religious minorities, and to respect the country's right for independence;

EXPRESS GRATITUDE to the United States Congress for passing Resolution 304 which condemned political oppression in Belarus and called upon the U.S. Government to act, both in Minsk and Moscow, on behalf of democracy in Belarus and preservation of its sovereignty and independence;

TO THANK PERSONALLY Congressmen Sam Gejdenson, Christopher H. Smith and Benjamin Gilman and Senators Jesse Helms, Ben Nighthorse Campbell and Richard Durbin, as well as Messrs. Harold H. Koh, Ross

Wilson and John L. Armstrong of the State Department, and many other officials within the U.S. Government and Congress, for their outstanding contribution to the defense of democracy in Belarus and the country's independence.

Source: *Coalition in Defense of Democracy and Human Rights in Belarus, Press Release, September 5, 2000.*



Łukašenka Unwelcome in New York

After visiting Cuba and lavishing praise on Castro, Łukašenka arrived in New York to attend the UN millennium summit. On September 6, the Belarusian diaspora staged a two-hour picket across the hotel in New York City, where the majority of heads of states were accommodated, reported Charter 97. The pickets were held under the banners, "Lukashenka is a dictator!"; "Lukashenka go away!"; "Free elections!"; "No to Russian occupation of Belarus"; "Long Live Belarus!"

One of the protesters, responding to the radio "Svaboda" correspondent, said: "You're asking why we took to the streets? Why we sacrifice our working time in order to protest under white-red-white flags? The answer is very, very simple. We want Belarus to be independent, we want our people to live free lives and earn enough money to feed their children. We don't want our youth to fight in the Russian army. There are many of us here and we hope that dictator Łukašenka will see us protesting. Long live Belarus!"

In his five-minute speech in the United Nations on September 6, Łukašenka criticized the policies of "certain big powers." Without naming any, he said those powers were trying to "foist their will upon other independent states." "This arrogant attempt to divide the peoples into 'teachers' and 'students' will not do any good for the promotion of democracy and human rights." The Belarusian leader did not meet with any European leaders there, and only had talks with heads of Algeria, Bangladesh, Iran and Turkey.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan gave a reception to honor the millennium summit. But it turned out that Mr. Łukašenka was not on the invitation list. According to *Kommmersant-Daily*, the Belarusian leader left New York in a huff before the event because, "he was gravely offended that his name was not on the list of the world leaders who had been invited to the reception." Interfax reported that Łukašenka's name was initially on the list but it was stricken down later. According to one report, a State Department official confirmed privately that the cancellation of the invitation was a matter of U.S. policy, and not an accident.

NEWS BRIEFS

Chronicle of Events

July 2

FOURTH CONGRESS OF DEMOCRATIC FORCES HELD IN MINSK

On July 2, the Forth Congress of the Belarusian Democratic Forces was held on the outskirts of Minsk, reported Charter 97. About 900 delegates from different opposition parties voted to boycott the fall parliamentary election unless Lukashenko meets their conditions for a fair contest. The vote was a sign of unity among the opposition, which is divided into at least eight parties and has no single leader: the delegates passed a boycott resolution by a show of hands, without dissent. "Under Lukashenko, Belarus has grown steadily more repressive toward independent media and political opposition. Anti-Lukashenko demonstrations have been broken up by truncheon-wielding police, and opposition figures have disappeared in what their colleagues say are police abductions," said the delegates. They reminded the Belarusian leader about his failed promises to 1) amend the Electoral Code, 2) grant effective authority to parliament, 3) give the opposition access to mass media, and 4) respect the freedom of assembly and speech -- all conditions which OSCE has promoted. Otherwise, opposition representatives said, "we would urge European countries not to send election observers and not to consider the election valid." Meanwhile, few local observers seem to think that Lukashenko would comply. "We have already decided that we will not take part in the election, because it will be a farce," said Stanislav Shushkevich, former chair of the 12th Supreme Soviet, independent Belarus' first Head of State. (Charter 97, July 2)

July 3

BELARUS MARKS VICTORY/INDEPENDENCE DAY.

Some 15,000 people marched through Minsk on 3 July to mark the 56th anniversary of the liberation of Belarus at the end of World War II, ITAR-TASS reported. Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who has decreed 3 July the country's independence day, used the occasion to say that "the union with Russia does not endanger Belarus' sovereignty and independence." He also argued that "independence is the most valuable thing our people have." (RFE/RL Newsline, July 3)

July 27

OPPOSITION CELEBRATES UNOFFICIAL INDEPENDENCE DAY

On July 27, opposition activists in many Belarusian regions marked the 10th anniversary of the Declaration of Sovereignty adopted by the Supreme Soviet of Belarus in 1990, reported BPF Adradzhenne Press service. [Belarus used to celebrate its independence on July 27 but after the May 1996 referendum staged by Lukashenko, who discourages nationalism and favors strong ties with Russia, the date was

changed to July 3, the day when Soviet troops liberated Minsk from the Nazis in 1944.].

A group of activistsof Malady Front, a youth NGO, marched through the downtown Minsk, making stops near public buildings for picketing. In the evening, a rock concert was organized at the outskirts of Minsk. In Mogilev= , about one hundred marched through the city center, waving white-red-white flags. [The May 1996 referendum also resulted in the introduction of Soviet-style state symbols to replace the historic emblems, and the white-red-white flag became a symbol of opposition to the Lukashenko government and a symbol of street protests in the country.-Ed...]. No incidents with the police were reported.

Opposition activists in Grodno commemorated the 10th anniversary of Belarus's declaration of sovereignty from the Soviet Union by several small demonstrations, a festive rally, and a concert. Opposition pickets were held in Novopolotsk, Vitebsk Region, Zaslavl, Minsk Region, Volkovysk, Voronovo, Grodno Region and Logoysk, Minsk Region. The authorities prohibited demonstrations in Brest, Baranavichy, Bereza, and Pinsk, Brest Region, Maryina Gorka, Molodechno, Minsk Region, and Buda-Koshelev, Gomel Region. The Baranavichy City Council motivated its refusal to permit a demonstratio= n organized by the local branch of the BPF Adradzhenne by saying that it has already granted the permission to stage similar demonstration to the Conservative Christian Party of the Belarusian Popular Front and suggested that the applicants should take part in the already permitted picket.

In Gomel, an unauthorized picket, organized by the local branch of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party, was held near the building of the Gomel Regional Council. The picketers held placards saying "Congratulations with Independence Day" and "Stop fascism in Belarus." BSDP activists Ekaterina Gorovaya and Igor Romanov were detained by the police. During the detention, Romanov was thrown on the ground with his face down and handcuffed. On July 31, the activists stood trial and were found guilty of allegedly "organizing and actively participating in mass actions which violated public order," under Art. 168, para 1, of the Belarusian Criminal Code, reported Viasna Human Rights Center. Gorovaya was sentenced to five days and Romanov to seven days of administrative arrest.

In Molodechno, several people were detained by police for an attempt to hold a rally in a town's park. Ales Kapucki, chair of the local branch of the BPF Adradzhenne, and Syarhey Boskin, activist of the Conservative Christian Party of the Belarusian Popular Front, were taken to the nearest police station, but were released soon. Yauhen Luhouski, who was arrested for holding a self-made white-red-white flag, was charged with using unregistered symbols. (BPF Press service, July 28, Viasna Human Rights Center, August 1)

July 29

ALL-BELARUSIAN CONGRESS HELD IN MIENSK

Nasha Svaboda, an independent newspaper, reported that on July 29, the All-Belarusian Congress held its first session in Minsk. About 1,500 delegates from all six Belarusian Regions and about 100 international guests attended the gathering. Czech President Vaclav Havel sent a welcoming address to the forum participants. Heads of the French, Polish, Ukrainian, and German diplomatic missions to Belarus attended the meeting, while the Russian Embassy in Minsk declined the invitation, reported Belapan. Before the meeting, the Belarusian Ministry of Justice warned political parties and organizations in opposition to the regime that resolutions of the Congress will not have any legal power. (See Belarus Update Vol.. 3, No. 26).

Stanislav Shushkevich, former Chair of the Supreme Soviet, independent Belarus's first Head of State, said in his speech that the preservation of Belarusian independence, the salvation of the state sovereignty, the return to democracy and Belarus's reentry into the European Home are the necessary conditions precedent for creating normal life-style for the 10 million Belarusians and for the security of Belarus' neighbors and Europe as a whole. "As long as Belarus remains under authoritarian rule of dubious legitimacy, the country will have difficulty modernizing its political and economic institutions. Lukashenka tries through establishing the union with Russia to solve difficult economic problems that he had created himself," said Mikhail Chigir, former Belarusian Prime Minister.

The delegates unanimously passed the Act of Independence of the Republic of Belarus. "The breakdown of democracy has made a voluntary decision by the Belarusian people impossible; the Lukashenko regime long ago lost its democratic legitimacy and lacks the authority to commit Belarus to something that could diminish the country's sovereignty and independence," said the delegates in the document. "All steps taken by the Belarusian authorities aimed at limiting the republic's sovereignty must be recognized as illegal and criminal." The delegates regard the union as a community of two unequal partners into which Belarus was "dragged to play the role of Russia's defense shield as Moscow tries to counter NATO's expansion eastward." "We shall not allow our independence to be eliminated, our sovereignty to be restricted, and our country to be destroyed. Only independence and state sovereignty open the way for our country to the European and world democratic communities," said the delegates. The Congress called on all Belarusian citizens and all fellow compatriots abroad to unite around the ideas of this Act of Independence and to defend the Belarusian sovereignty. The delegates urged the parliaments and governments of democratic states, international organizations, and the world community at large to ensure the sovereignty of Belarus. (Nasha Svaboda, July 31- Belapan, July 29

PRESIDENT HAVEL EXPRESSED HIS SUPPORT FOR BELARUS' INDEPENDENCE

President Vaclav Havel of the of Czech Republic greeted the delegates to the All-Belarusian Congress for Independence. In his letter he wrote:

" Esteemed delegates, dear friends:

I am glad to be able to greet your gathering that has a connection with the first All-Belarusian congress that took place at the end of 1917 and was the determining step toward present Belarusian statehood.

I am certain that in the new world order, which we find ourselves in over the last decade, brought many changes in our lives, only those participants can coexist in peace and equality who became aware of their own self-determination. I believe that the reminder and legacy of Belarusian statehood and independence are necessary prerequisites for strengthening the national self-determination of the Belarusian people.

In my conversations with people from your country I heard many times that Belarus remembers well the way communism collapsed in our country.

I consider part of the responsibility of all citizens of the Czech Republic, of all Europeans, and indeed of all who believe in and defend values such as democracy, to show their interest in the present situation of Belarus and its citizens,

to express their views regarding this situation and to help promote democracy in Belarus. I wish your gathering a peaceful course of events and much success." (Naša Niva, July 31, 2000)

ACT OF INDEPENDENCE OF BELARUS

We, the delegates to the All-Belarusian Congress, plenipotentiary representatives of the Belarusian people,

— being aware of our responsibility for the future of our country

— recalling that Republic of Belarus is one of the founders of the United Nations

— basing our actions on principles and standards of international and national law

DECLARE:

The Belarusian people have a thousand-year old history of statehood: from the Duchy of Polacak, the Grand Duchy of Litva, and the Belarusian People's Republic up to present time. The Declaration of State Sovereignty, adopted on July 27 1990 by the Supreme Council, confirms as the main goal — free development, welfare, and a dignified life for all citizens of Belarus. The Declaration proclaims the country's independence in relation to foreign countries, territorial integrity, independence and legitimacy of state authority abiding by valid laws. Any steps directed against Belarusian sovereignty and the national statehood are unacceptable and shall be punished as the gravest crime.

State sovereignty was secured by the Constitution, adopted on March 15, 1994. According to this constitution Belarus is a neutral, peaceful and non-nuclear state.

Independence of Belarus has been won not only by the present generation, but also by our ancestors, and belongs to our descendants. Sovereignty of the country cannot be limited or annulled by the decision of state representatives or organs, not even by a referendum.

Independence of the Republic of Belarus is being threatened today. The real danger is presented by the agreement on creation of a so-called union state with Russia, signed on December 8, 1999 by representatives of Belarus' authorities, whose legitimacy is not recognized by most countries of the world. We want to maintain good and mutually advantageous relations with all countries of the world, and especially with our neighbors: Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. However, we do not want to become a province of another state. We will not allow the liquidation of our independence and abridgement of our sovereignty; we won't permit the extinction of our country.

Independence is a natural right of all peoples and of all citizens. Only it and state sovereignty can open for our country the path to the European and international democratic community.

We, the delegates to the All-Belarusian Congress,

CONFIRM

The God- and history-given right of our people for an independent state with its ancient symbols: the white-red-white flag and the emblem Pahonia.

PROCLAIM

independence and state sovereignty to be values, that cannot be taken away from the Belarusian people,

CONSIDER

unlawful any arrangements and decisions directed toward annulment or abridgement of Belarus' sovereignty

APPEAL

to all citizens of Belarus and all compatriots living abroad to unite around ideas of the Independence Document of Belarus and to defend the independence of their Fatherland; parliaments and governments of democratic states, international organizations and the world public to ensure the guarantees of sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus.

Long live Belarus !

Adopted by the All-Belarusian Congress on July 29, 2000 in Minsk

September 3

BELARUS, CUBA SIGN FRIENDSHIP TREATY, TRADE ACCORD

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and Cuban leader Fidel Castro met in Havana on 3 September and signed a treaty on friendship and cooperation, Reuters reported. Castro praised Belarus as one of the former Soviet republics that has most sought to maintain friendly relations with Cuba since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Earlier the same day, Belarusian Foreign Minister Ural Latypau and Cuban Foreign Trade Minister Raul de la Nuez signed an accord on mutual trade. Cuba estimated trade with Belarus in 1999 at $11 million, while Belarusian officials put the figure at $42 million. Cuban officials said the discrepancy might be due to some products being shipped through third countries. (RFE/RL Newsline, Sept. 4)

September 7

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT MEETS CHINA'S LI PENG.

Alyaksandr Lukashenka met with Chinese parliamentary chairman Li Peng in Minsk on 7 September, Belarusian Television reported. Lukashenka expressed Belarus's readiness to cooperate with China in the "technological and even technological-military sphere," the station reported, without elaborating. Lukashenka noted that the two countries' "views on global problems absolutely coincide," and he expressed gratitude for the fact that Belarus finds in China "reliable support [and] an influential friend." Lukashenka said there are 13 Belarusian-Chinese joint ventures, while trade turnover between the two countries reached $250 million in 1999. "This is the answer to all those criticizing us for our cooperation with China and for choosing China as our strategic partner," Lukashenka said. (RFE/RL Newsline, Sept. 8)

October 1

BELARUS IN SYDNEY OLYMPIC GAMES

Belarusian athletes won 3 gold medals, 3 silver medals and 11 bronze medals, placing 23rd in the field of 199 nations.

The gold medals were won by:

* Kaciaryna Karsten (skiff boat, women)
* Alena Zvierava (discus, women)
* Janina Karolčyk (shotput, women)

October 1

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION HOLDS ANTI-ELECTION RALLY

Up to 15,000 people took part in the "Freedom March-3" in Minsk on 1 October, Belapan reported. The march and a subsequent meeting protested the undemocratic nature of the 15 October legislative elections and called for a nationwide boycott of that ballot. Police did not intervene, and the rally ended without any reported violence or arrests, except for the seizure of several horses that the organizers intended to use for a show depicting Belarus's historical coat-of-arms "Pahonya" (Knight-in-Pursuit), which was replaced by a Soviet-like symbol following the May 1995 referendum. So far, charges have not been brought against the horses. The opposition plans to stage similar protest actions in 23 Belarusian cities on 8 October. (RFE/RL Newsline, October 2)

October 4

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONISTS SUMMONED OVER CALLS TO BOYCOTT ELECTIONS

Police are conducting a manhunt in Minsk in a bid to deliver a court summons to Popular Front leader Vintsuk Vyachorka and Social Democratic Party leader Stanislau Shushkevich, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 4 October. So far, they have succeeded in handing a summons to Supreme Soviet deputy Lyudmila Hraznova. The three are to stand trial over calling for an election boycott while they were taking part in "Freedom March-3." (RFE/RL Newsline, October 5)

POLITICS

EUROPEAN PARTIES SEEK ALLIES IN BELARUS — A delegation of Lithuania's Conservative Party, the Great Britain's Conservative Party, Sweden's Moderate Party, and the Polish Freedom Union, visited Belarus in late June to conduct a fact-collecting campaign initiated by the European Democratic Union (EDU), reported the Baltic News Service. "We wanted to get a better idea about the political situation in Belarus," said Rasa Jukneviciene, a leader of Lithuania's ruling Conservative Party. The delegation met the leaders of the Belarusian United Civic Party to discuss the political crisis in the country before the parliamentary elections scheduled for this fall. The delegation also held talks with representatives of the OSCE AMG in Belarus. (Baltic News Service, June 29)

BELARUS OPPOSITION AT OSCE — WITHOUT MINSK FUNDING — Semyon Sharetskiy, the chairman of Belarus's 13th Supreme Soviet, led a delegation of Belarusian opposition figures to the OSCE meeting in Bucharest, ITAR-TASS reported on 9 July. But the Belarusian government did not fund their trip. Instead, it was paid for by two German funds that support democratic opposition groups in Eastern Europe, the Russian agency said. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 10)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION TAKES PART IN OSCE PA — On July 6-10, a delegation of the 13th Supreme Soviet, headed by its Chair Semyon Sharetski, took part in the ninth session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Bucharest, Nasha Svaboda reported. Adrian Severin, chair of the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Working Group on Belarus, has been elected the new President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. During the session, Severin presented a Resolution on Belarus, adopted by the Annual Session as part of its Final Declaration. The resolution urges the Belarusian authorities to undertake all necessary measures to have a free and fair parliamentary election this coming fall. It emphasizes the necessity to establish conditions for sending international observers and to ensure participation of Belarus democratic forces in the election, including a more democratic electoral code, access of the opposition to the state-run mass media, and abstaining from political repression before the vote. The resolution calls on the Lukashenko government to respect the freedom of assembly to facilitate the climate of trust in the country, and make use of the limited time available to continue negotiations with the opposition. (Nasha Svaboda, July 11)

OSCE CALLS FOR GOVERNMENT-OPPOSITION TALKS IN BELARUS — The OSCE's Parliamentary Assembly on 10 July adopted a resolution urging Minsk to begin "real" talks with the opposition instead of continuing with the dialogue the regime has so far sponsored, Belapan reported on 11 July. The resolution said that opposition participation in upcoming elections is out of the question unless the government adopts election practices that conform with international norms. The resolution garnered support from virtually all participants in the Bucharest meeting: only the Russian delegation, several delegates from Uzbekistan and one from Ukraine voted against. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 12)

BELARUS, RUSSIA CONSULT ON BORDER. Colonel General Konstantin Totskii, the director of Russia's Border Guard Service, and Lieutenant General Alyaksandr Paulouski, the chairman of the State Committee of the Border Troops of Belarus, are discussing the interaction of their two services at a meeting of the Board of the Union of Belarus and Russia Border Committee, ITAR-TASS reported on 11 July. They are reported to be focusing on how to put a stop to illegal cross-border migration as well as discussing a plan for developing the border over the next five years. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 12)

CZECH SENATORS CONDEMN LUKASHENKO REGIME — On July 12, the Czech Senate adopted a resolution criticizing violations of human rights in Belarus, reported CTK New Service. The resolution, which was sponsored by Sen.. Mikhail Zhantovsky and Sen. Jan Ruml, condemns the persecution of the Lukashenko regime's opponents. Czech Senators expressed deep concern at the disappearance of political opponents in the country, pointing out that the exercise of freedom of expression, assembly, and association is severely restricted and that neither judiciary nor the bar is independent. The authors of the resolution called on the Czech government to place pressure on the Belarusian government to honor its pledge to hold free and fair parliamentary election this year and presidential election in 2001. (CTK, July 12)

EU TELLS BELARUS TO GIVE OPPOSITION ACCESS TO STATE MEDIA — French Ambassador Bernard Fassier, whose country currently holds the EU's rotating presidency, told Belarusian officials on 12 July that the union will recognize the upcoming parliamentary elections in Belarus only if Minsk gives the opposition parties access to state media and expands the powers of the parliament, AP reported. Meanwhile, Interfax-Belarus reported, members of the Russian State Duma sent an appeal to Belarusian leader Alyaksandr Lukashenka urging him to make the Belarusian vote democratic. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 13)

LUKASHENKA SETS BELARUSIAN VOTE FOR 15 OCTOBER — Belarusian leader Alyaksandr Lukashenka has set 15 October as the date for parliamentary elections, Belapan reported on 13 July. The 110 seats in the lower house of the parliament are to be filled by voting in single-member constituencies. Elections for the upper house are also supposed to take place before the end of the year. Meanwhile, despite criticism both in the West and in Belarus, the Central Elec-

tion Commission of the Russian Federation said that the Belarusian electoral code is "quite satisfactory," according to the Belarusian agency. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 14)

OPPOSITION TO BOYCOTT VOTE — Interfax reported on July 17 that the united Belarusian opposition had announced it will not take part in the parliamentary elections scheduled for October 15. This position was adopted by The Coordinating Council of the Belarusian Democratic Forces, which issued a statement on July 17. The authors of this statement reminded Lukashenko about his failed promises to amend the Electoral Code, grant real authority to the parliament, give the opposition access to mass media, and respect the freedom of assembly and speech. "Before the date of elections was set up, the nondemocratic election legislation had come into force, which does not allow opposing political parties to freely include their representatives in district committees and monitor the elections," the opposition said in the statement.

Vincuk Viacorka, chairman of the BPF Adradzennie, has defined the recent setting of a parliamentary election date as "disrespect for the international community's opinion." "Lukashenko would have never signed the decree setting the date if he had not been allowed by Russia," Viacorka told Belapan. The BPF leader pointed out that none of the four conditions adopted at the Congress of Democratic Forces and supported in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's resolution on Belarus has been met. "We will in no way participate in this farce. We will neither nominate candidates nor send observers nor support independent candidates. We are not going to create Lukashenko's handpicked parliament with our own hands," Viacorka concluded. (Belarus Update, #30, July 2000; Interfax July 17 - Belapan, July 17)

POLL SHOWS BELARUSIANS DISCONTENTED WITH LUKASHENKA'S RULE — The Independent Institute of Socioeconomic and Political Studies and the Social and Economic Research Center recently asked some 1,500 Belarusians: "Are you satisfied with how Alyaksandr Lukashenka ruled the country during the [past] six years?" Twenty- two percent said they are "rather satisfied," while 32 percent said they are "rather dissatisfied." Forty-five percent were "partly satisfied and partly dissatisfied," while 1 percent did not give a definite answer. The same poll showed that 31 percent of respondents want to emigrate from Belarus, of whom 10 percent would like to go to the U.S., 9 percent to Germany, 3 percent to Russia, and 2 percent to Poland. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 18)

AUTHORITIES ACCUSE TRADE UNIONS OF 'DISTORTING' SITUATION IN BELARUS — The presidential administration has accused "some trade union leaders" of "imposing on Belarus's public opinion and the world community a groundless theory about the infringement of trade union rights by the authorities," Belarusian Television reported on 19 July. The administration said those leaders have "usurped" the right to speak in the name of Belarusian citizens and "distorted" the image of Belarus in foreign countries. "The attempt of those leaders to organize a mass pressure [campaign] on the state structures through international appeals...is motivated only by their striving to keep their lucrative posts," the administration noted. Quoting suppression of trade union rights, the U.S. recently suspended the benefits Belarus had received under the Generalized System of Preferences for the world's poorest countries (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 7 July 2000). (RFE/RL Newsline, July 20)

EU'S SOLANA URGES BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT TO TALK WITH OPPOSITION — EU Foreign Policy Commissioner Javier Solana had a 50-minute telephone conversation with Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 21 July, expressing his concerns about the preparations for the 15 October parliamentary elections in Belarus, Reuters reported, citing a statement by Solana's office. Solana asked Lukashenka to "assure a free, transparent, and democratic electoral process, and stressed the need to engage in constructive dialogue with the opposition," the statement said. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 21)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION PLANS TO COUNTER 'FALL FARCE.' — The Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces has resolved to oppose this fall's parliamentary elections in Belarus with joint anti-regime actions, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 24 July. Anatol Lyabedzka, Vintsuk Vyachorka, and Uladzimir Nistsyuk told journalists that the 15 October elections, which they described as a "fall farce," will be neither free nor democratic. They said that in the fall, the opposition will conduct a poll among voters on the four requirements by the opposition and the international community to democratize the electoral process in Belarus: opposition access to the state media, democratizing the electoral code, expanding the legislature's powers, and stopping political persecution in the country. The opposition will also stage street protests in Belarusian cities to coincide with the election campaign. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 25)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION SNUBS ROUND TABLE ON ELECTIONS... — The seven opposition parties grouped in the Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces did not take part in the 25 July round table on this fall's parliamentary elections, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service and Belapan reported. The opposition parties said they welcome the authorities' round-table initiative but would prefer to participate in a meeting that is broadcast live, "given the many instances of distortion by the state media of the stance of opposition parties, tendentious reporting [by those media], and the authorities' recently launched campaign to discredit opposition political parties and a number of public organizations." "This round table was held not to inform the electorate about our stance but to tick off [another campaign item by the authorities] and present it to the Council of Europe," opposition leader Anatol Lyabedzka told RFE/RL. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 26)

...WHILE PRO-REGIME PARTIES SAY THEY ARE HAPPY ABOUT BALLOT — The pro-government leftist parties that attended the 25 July round table said they will participate in the 15 October elections to the Chamber of Representatives. They praised the country's electoral code, called for consolidation of all "healthy forces" in Belarus, and condemned the opposition to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The only dissonance at the forum stemmed from Syarhey Kalyakin, leader of the Belarusian Party of Communists. Kalyakin said his party has decided to take part in this fall's elections, but he added that the situation in Belarus does not provide for a democratic, fair, and transparent ballot. "Generally speaking, today's atmosphere in society is that of fear and repression by the authorities of dissent in the country," RFE/RL's Belarusian Service quoted Kalyakin as saying. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 26)

MINSK-MOSCOW-BEIJING AXIS BECOMING REALITY? — Lukashenka also noted on 26 July that the rapprochement between Beijing and Moscow gives substance to his idea of forming an alliance between Belarus, Russia, and China. "While earlier many in Russia laughed at [the Minsk-Moscow-Beijing alliance idea], today, after Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to China, this [idea] is becoming reality," Belapan quoted Lukashenka as saying. "We have confirmed our resolution to support the PRC's interests on the European Continent," Lukashenka noted. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 27)

BELARUS'S STATE BROADCASTING COMPANY GETS NEW CHIEF — Lukashenka has appointed Viktar Chykin, head of the pro-government Communist Party of Belarus, as chief of the State Television and Radio Company. "I think the character traits that he has already demonstrated--humanness, perseverance--are indisputable," Lukashenka told journalists. As Minsk's deputy mayor, Chykin has become notorious for banning many opposition rallies in the capital's center and dealing harshly with meetings he has authorized. "[Chykin's appointment] shows that on the eve of the election season, the Lukashenka regime is not going to loosen [its grip], is not even going to pretend liberalization," opposition leader Vintsuk Vyachorka told RFE/RL. "The appointment of the man who banned rallies [and] let dogs loose on demonstrators...is another proof that this regime wants only one thing--unlimited power and unlimited dictatorship--and will continue to lie, lie, and lie," Belarusian filmmaker Uladzimir Khalip commented. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 27)

U.S. URGES BELARUS TO REALIZE 'DREAM' OF INDEPENDENCE — The U.S. on 27 July marked the 10th anniversary of Belarus's declaration of sovereignty from the Soviet Union by urging the government to "realize the dream" of a democratic and independent country, Reuters reported. "Ten years later...much remains to be done to realize the dream of a democratic and independent Belarus in which the rights of all citizens are respected and which is part of the international and Euroatlantic community," the White House said in a statement. The U.S. also called on the Belarusian authorities to take all necessary steps to hold free and fair elections in line with OSCE requirements, beginning with parliamentary elections this fall. RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported the same day that Belarusian democratic forces marked the anniversary of the sovereignty declaration by staging pickets and rallies in a number of Belarusian cities. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 28)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT INVITES FOREIGN OBSERVERS TO ELECTIONS — Alyaksandr Lukashenka said on 28 July that the authorities want foreign observers to be present at the 15 October parliamentary elections in Belarus, Belarusian Television reported. "If they come--thanks, it will be good. If they don't, the elections will take place all the same," Lukashenka added. He said the authorities are not interested in "falsified elections" and pledged to give foreign observers "full access to the electoral process." Lukashenka noted that "we are holding these elections not for the West or the United States but for ourselves," adding that the ballot is "only a dress rehearsal" for the presidential elections due next year. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 31)

PACE MISSION IN MINSK TO EXAMINE SITUATION AHEAD OF ELECTIONS — A delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) led by Terry Davis arrived in Minsk on 31 July, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. The delegation intends to assess the current political situation in the country and determine whether conditions are in place to hold democratic parliamentary elections on 15 October. "Our aim is to gather information about the situation in Belarus and subsequently decide--following consultations with colleagues from [the OSCE and the European Parliament]--if we are to send international observers to those elections," Davis told RFE/RL on 28 July. The delegation will hold meetings with, among others, Prime Minister Uladzimir Yarmoshyn, Foreign Minister Uladzimir Ural Latypau, and Chamber of Representatives Chairman Anatol Malafeyeu as well as with the opposition. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 1)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT ORDERS 'CONGRESS OF SOVIETS' — Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 1 August signed a decree to convene a "congress of soviets" on 29 September, Belarusian Television reported. The forum, which is expected to be attended by some 2,500 people, will include 1,500 deputies from local legislative power bodies, or soviets. According to the television station, the congress will discuss the enhancement of the role of soviets in society, economic problems, and the "further democratization" of the country. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 2)

BELARUSIAN NGO SAYS 'CONGRESS OF SOVIETS' TO PROMOTE PRO-REGIME CANDIDATES — The Belarusian Helsinki Committee has said the "Congress of Soviets" decreed by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka to convene in September (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 2 August 2000) is an "overt and cynical interference" in the parliamentary election campaign, Belapan reported on 2 August. According to Lukashenka's decree, the congress is to receive broad coverage in the state media, including live radio and television broadcasts. The committee believes that the congress's real aim is to promote those candidates for the Chamber of Representatives whom the authorities want to see elected on 15 October. "It should be noted that Belarus's current legislature was also formed by the president of those deputies of the 13th Supreme Soviet who pledged their loyalty to him," the committee added in a statement. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 3)

PACE DELEGATION ADVISES AGAINST SENDING OBSERVERS TO BELARUSIAN POLLS — A delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on 4 August advised against sending international observers to monitor Belarus's parliamentary elections on 15 October, AP reported. "We are very disappointed by the apparent lack of progress in creating adequate conditions necessary for holding free and fair elections in Belarus," the delegation's head, Terry Davis, said in a statement in Minsk. The statement noted that little has been done by the Belarusian government to meet the OSCE conditions, which included establishing a democratic election code, providing adequate access to the media for all political parties, and abstaining from political repression before the vote. "Given the existing circumstances, the delegation will not recommend the PACE to send observers to these elections," the statement said, adding that the PACE will make a decision on observers at the end of August. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 4)

BELARUS SAYS PACE MISSION MADE 'UNFAIR' RECOMMENDATIONS — The Belarusian Foreign Ministry on 4 August expressed "disappointment and misunderstanding" regarding the decision by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) delegation not to recommend sending international observers to the 15 October parliamentary election in Belarus (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 4 August 2000). Ministry spokesman Pavel Latushka said the PACE delegation "preferred not to notice" the fact that the Electoral Code is "much more democratic" than the law under which the country elected its former legislature, the Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation. Latushka added that the PACE delegation's conclusions and recommendations are "unfair and biased," and he slammed the Council of Europe for pursuing a policy of "double standards." (RFE/RL Newsline, August 7)

NOMINATION OF PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES STARTS IN BELARUS — According to the schedule approved by the Central Electoral Commission, Belarus on 6 August entered the nomination phase in the parliamentary election campaign. Candidates for the 110 seats in the Chamber of Representatives may be proposed by working collectives, political parties, or groups of no less than 1,000 citizens. The registration of candidates will take place from 4-14 September, while campaigning will be allowed from 15 September

to 14 October. Meanwhile, presidential aide Syarhey Posakhau told journalists on 7 August that the authorities have complied with all the requirements of the OSCE and other European organizations to make the elections democratic and free. Posakhau's assessment is not shared by the Belarusian opposition, which calls the 15 October ballot a "farce" and has decided to boycott it. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 8)

US OFFICIAL: BELARUS IS AREA OF INTENSE CONCERN — On August 8, in his remarks dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, Dr. Harold Koh, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, mentioned Serbia, Belarus, Russia, and = a number of other former Soviet republics, as the most serious human rights abusers in Europe. "Hundreds of millions of people are better off because of the Helsinki Act," Koh said, "many millions of others are still waiting for freedom and the question is how do we make sure they don't lose hope." Koh stressed that a quarter-century after the signing of the Helsinki Final Act= , the human rights situation in Belarus remains an "area of intense concern" for the United States and other democracies. "The country in sinking lower and lower into authoritarianism, self-isolationism," noted the US official. Adopted in the Finnish capital on August 1, 1975, by the leaders of European nations as well as the United States and Canada, the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe committed its signatories to respect human rights and universal freedoms. It is also credited with laying the groundwork for the democratic revolutions that swept Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s and led to the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1991. (USIA, August 8)

OPPOSITION PREPARES FOR NATIONWIDE REFERENDUM — Belapan reported on August 8 that the united Belarusian opposition had announced it would collect 450,000 signatures needed under the law to initiate a nationwide referendum as a counterbalance to the ongoing election campaign in Belarus. This decision was adopted by the Coordinating Council of the Belarusian Democratic Forces, which issued a statement on August 7. The authors of the statement reminded Lukashenko about his failed promises to amend the Electoral Code, grant real authority to the parliament, give the opposition access to mass media, and respect the freedom of assembly an= d speech. The four abovementioned conditions will provide the basis for the referendum's questions. In July, seven anti-Lukashenko parties, including the United Civic Party, BPF Adradzhenne, Belarusian Social Democratic Party= , Belarusian Women's Party, Belarusian Labor Party, Congress of Democratic Trade Unions, and the Association of NGOs voted to boycott the election because the regime had failed to create conditions for the free and fair vote. The Council is also planning to organize a network of monitors to record violations during the election campaign. On August 8, in an interview to RFE/RL, Anatoly Lebedko, chair of the United Civic Party, said that the referendum initiative is a political action aimed at explaining to the electorate that the October 15 ballot in Belarus will not be free and democratic. The opposition leader believes the regime will bar the referendum even if the opposition collects the required number of signatures; therefore, the opposition is not going to register groups for collecting signatures with the Central Commission for Elections and National Referenda. (Belapan- RFE/RL, August 8)

BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES FREEZE TRADE UNION BANK ACCOUNT — The State Committee for Financial Investigations has frozen the bank account of the administration of Belarus's Trade Union Federation (FTUB), leaving some 120 FTUB employees without their July salaries, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 8 August. FTUB administration head Anatol Sadouski told RFE/RL that the committee's move is "groundless." President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's administration last month accused "some trade union leaders" of provoking international economic sanctions against Belarus through international complaints about violations of workers' rights in Belarus (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 20 July 2000). (RFE/RL Newsline, August 9)

OSCE ELECTION EXPERTS ARRIVE IN MINSK — A delegation of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights on 9 August arrived in Minsk on a three-day visit to study the situation in the runup to the 15 October parliamentary elections in Belarus, Belapan reported. The delegation consists of three experts of the office's election section: Hrair Balian, Andrew Bruce, and Jessie Pilgrim. Following the advise of this section, the OSCE did not recognize the 1996 November constitutional referendum in Belarus. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 10)

OSCE ENVOYS CONFER WITH BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION ON ELECTIONS — A delegation of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 10 August 2000) met with Belarusian oppositionists in Minsk on 10 August to discuss the 15 October legislative elections in Belarus, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. Delegation head Hrair Balian said the mission's goal is not to conduct polemics with the authorities or the opposition about the legitimacy of elected power bodies but to see if anything can be changed in Belarus before 30 August, when the OSCE is expected to make a decision on whether or not to send international observers to the Belarusian elections. Belarusian oppositionists maintained that there are neither political nor legal conditions in Belarus for sending observers to the ballot. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 11)

FORMER BELARUSIAN PREMIER TO RUN IN LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS — Mikhail Chyhir will run as a candidate in a Minsk constituency in the 15 October ballot to the Chamber of Representatives, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 12 August. Chyhir, who had appealed a three-year prison sentence handed down earlier this year for alleged abuse of office (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 19 May 2000), said he will take part in the ballot because of the need for protection against pressure and persecution from the regime. "I should defend myself. If I am elected, it will be more difficult for the authorities to deal with me, since a deputy's mandate is a protecting means to some extent," Belapan quoted Chyhir as saying. According to Chyhir, his decision to run does not harm the Belarusian opposition, which has declared it is boycotting the elections, because he does not belong to any political party. Chyhir's wife, Yuliya, will run as a candidate in a provincial constituency in the October ballot. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 14)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT OFFERS MEASURES TO DEMOCRATIZE ELECTIONS — Alyaksandr Lukashenka, in a letter to EU Foreign and Security Policy chief Javier Solana and OSCE Chairwoman Benita Ferrero-Waldner, made proposals to ensure free and fair elections to the Chamber of Representatives this fall, Belarusian Television reported on 14 August, citing the Foreign Ministry press service. Lukashenka reportedly pledged that representatives of the political parties that have nominated their election candidates will be included in the Central Election Commission as non-voting members. He also promised free air time on television for all registered candidates so that they can present their election platforms. "Belarus's leadership has obliged itself not to make conditions worse for the activities of public associations, political parties, and groups, includ-

ing the opposition ones, [as well as] free trade unions and the independent media," the Foreign Ministry press service said in a statement. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 15)

ANOTHER MAJOR BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONIST PLANS TO RUN IN ELECTIONS — Mikalay Statkevich, leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Popular Assembly), has registered a citizens' group supporting his possible candidacy in the 15 October ballot from a Minsk constituency, Belapan reported on 14 August. Statkevich told the news agency that he will make a final decision on his candidacy in September. Statkevich's party previously resolved that it will not take part in the elections but said it will not forbid its members from running if they are proposed by groups of citizens. Statkevich commented that he sees his participation in the ballot as a bid to protect himself from persecution by the regime, noting that he was handed down in June a two-year prison term for organizing an unauthorized rally. Former Premier Mikhail Chyhir has given a similar justification for his participation in the 15 October ballot (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 14 August 2000).(RFE/RL Newsline, August 15)

NEW STATE INFORMATION AGENCY TO APPEAR IN BELARUS? — President Lukashenka on 14 August conferred with government officials about the creation of a new state information agency and ordered them to prepare "all necessary documents" by October to make a final decision on the agency, Belarusian Television reported. "The main condition is that the agency should be absolutely state-run from the viewpoint of disseminating its product...and from the viewpoint of control over [its activities]," Lukashenka said. He added that the new agency will not abolish the current state-owned information agency BelTA. The new agency will be created in cooperation and partnership with Interfax. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 15)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION TO STAGE 'ACTIVE BOYCOTT' OF ELECTIONS — United Civic Party leader Anatol Lyabedzka announced on 15 August that the Belarusian democratic opposition will organize an "active boycott" campaign to discourage people from participating in the 15 October legislative elections, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. According to Lyabedzka, the campaign's goal is to prevent President Alyaksandr Lukashenka from strengthening his position before the presidential ballot next year. The opposition plans to begin collecting signatures on 1 September in support of a referendum on the OSCE's four requirements to democratize the electoral process in Belarus. The opposition also intends to hold a "Freedom March-3" in Minsk on 1 October and rallies under the slogan "Elections--Yes, Farce--No" in the provinces one week later. According to a recent poll by the Novak polling agency, 74 percent of Belarusians want to vote in the 15 October ballot. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 16)

SOME 60 BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONISTS REPORTEDLY TO RUN IN ELECTIONS —Viktar Ivashkevich, deputy chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front Party, said on 15 August that nearly 60 opposition politicians have decided to run in the 15 October ballot, Belapan reported. Ivashkevich added that their participation in the elections should not be viewed as a split of Belarus's "united opposition" which, according to his estimate, brings together some 15,000 people. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 16)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT'S OFFER TO DEMOCRATIZE ELECTIONS DEEMED 'INSIGNIFICANT.' — Mikalay Statkevich, leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Popular Assembly), has said that President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's recent initiative to democratize the election process in Belarus (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 15 August 2000) is "insignificant" and "cosmetic," Belapan reported on 16 August. Alena Skryhan, secretary of the Belarusian Communist Party, told the agency that Lukashenka's proposals constitute a propaganda move aimed at the OSCE and other European organizations, adding that there is no time to implement those proposals before the 15 October ballot. Anatol Lyabedzka, leader of the United Civic Party, recalled that in April 1997, official Minsk sent a letter to the European Council promising to discuss the balance of power branches in Belarus with the opposition but has failed to keep that pledge. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 17)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER CONSIDERS ELECTION BOYCOTT A 'MISTAKE.' — Mikalay Statkevich told Belapan on 16 August that the boycott of the 15 October elections to the Chamber of Representatives, which was announced by six opposition groups (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 16 August 2000), is a mistake and may cause "very dangerous consequences." Statkevich said the authorities may respond by either "blocking" the boycott or "helping" the opposition organize it. In the first case, he argued, the regime will be able to ensure that election turnout is sufficiently high to disprove that the opposition has any significant leverage in society. And if the authorities choose to help the opposition stage a boycott, Lukashenka will begin to rule the country by decree without any legislature, he added. Statkevich said he believes the elections will create a "new opposition center" in the Chamber of Representatives. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 17)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONIST SAYS ELECTIONS ARE 'PRIMITIVE JOB-GETTING.' — Anatol Lyabedzka, leader of the opposition United Civic Party, said he believes that the 15 October elections to the Chamber of Representatives are "primitive job-getting" for 110 people, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 21 August. "Elections to a parliament mean a struggle for power, while the elections to the Chamber [of Representatives] mean a struggle for privileges," Lyabedzka wrote on the Website of the "Charter 97" human rights group. The opposition united in the Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces has sent a letter to the OSCE and other European organizations explaining that it does not want to participate in an undemocratic ballot. The letter was in response to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's recent message to the OSCE and the EU proposing some measures to democratize the electoral process in Belarus (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 15 and 17 August 2000). (RFE/RL Newsline, August 22)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION TALKS EUROPE OUT OF SENDING ELECTION OBSERVERS — The Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces believes there are no political, legal, or moral grounds to send international observers to the 15 October legislative elections in Belarus, Belapan reported on 22 August. The council laid down this position in a letter sent to the OSCE Chairwoman Benita Ferrero-Waldner, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Adrian Severin, EU Foreign and Security Policy chief Javier Solana, Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly President Lord Russel-Johnson, and U.S. State Secretary Madeleine Albright. The letter says the arrival of international observers in Belarus would "actually mean the recognition of the elections" and might lead to "international legitimization of the anti-democratic and anti-European regime." The opposition argues that such a move would create conditions for the incorporation of Belarus into Russia, weaken and split the country's democratic forces, and prolong President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's term in office. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 23)

U.S. AMBASSADOR TO OSCE ARGUES AGAINST SENDING OBSERVERS TO BELARUSIAN POLLS — David T. Johnson said in a statement last week that sending interna-

tional observers to Belarus's 15 October elections "at the urging of a regime that seeks such observation as a badge of legitimacy would be a mistake." Johnson noted that the Belarusian government has made no real progress toward complying with the OSCE's four conditions to democratize the electoral process. And he called Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's recent pledges to undertake some democratizing measures (see "RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report," 15 August 2000) "overdue, inadequate, and hollow in the absence of meaningful implementation." According to Johnson, the elections are taking place at a time of increased political repression and harassment of journalists, while Lukashenka's announcement of a "period of peace" comes late and cannot be put to the test by the opposition or international community. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 28)

OSCE MISSION, GERMAN EMBASSY IN BELARUS REJECT OPPOSITION CRITICISM — The Conservative Christian Party on 25 August accused the OSCE mission in Minsk of supporting "Russia's occupation policy" vis-a-vis Belarus by "campaigning for the dictator[-sponsored] pseudo-elections." The party, which is led by Zyanon Paznyak, also demanded that the mission's head, Hans Georg Wieck, be replaced. The OSCE mission responded on 28 August that it considers the charges a "defamation campaign" that shows Paznyak's party is not "an interlocutor that can be taken seriously on the political stage and in the international arena," Belapan reported. The party's accusations--which extended to "certain political groups in Western Europe, especially German diplomats"--were also criticized by the German embassy in Minsk. The embassy called those accusations unfounded, adding that Germany is conducting its policy toward Belarus "in cooperation with [Germany's] political allies and the OSCE." (RFE/RL Newsline, August 29)

INTERNATIONAL NGO TO MONITOR BELARUSIAN BALLOT — Aaron Rhodes, executive director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHFHR), told journalists in Minsk on 29 August that his organization will monitor the 15 October elections to the Chamber of Representatives, Belapan reported. The IHFHR will conduct its monitoring, which is part of an EU-sponsored project in Belarus, in cooperation with the Belarusian Helsinki Committee. Rhodes said he does not expect the IHFHR's monitoring to influence the international community's decision on whether to recognize the newly elected legislature. He noted that the Belarusian government has created conditions for possible election frauds, especially during the so-called early voting procedure. According to Rhodes, only 4 percent of the country's electoral commission members are not associated with the government.(RFE/RL Newsline, August 30)

OSCE RECOMMENDS SENDING 'LIMITED MISSION' TO BELARUS POLLS — Experts from the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and the European Parliament, meeting in Vienna on 30 August, recommended that the OSCE send a "limited technical assessment mission" to the 15 October legislative elections in Belarus. In an adopted document, the experts said the electoral process in Belarus "still falls short of the internationally agreed criteria." They stressed that the mission's presence in Belarus would not "constitute an act of international recognition of the democratic character and outcome of the parliamentary election process." The OSCE is to discuss these recommendations on 31 August.(RFE/RL Newsline, August 31)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT BEMOANS 'SLACKENING'IN UNION WITH RUSSIA — Alyaksandr Lukashenka complained to Russian Communist Party leader Gennadii Zyuganov in Minsk on 30 August that the Belarus-Russia Union has not only stopped evolving but also is witnessing a "slackening" in relations between the two countries, Belarusian Television reported. "I have the impression that those who once fiercely obstructed the signing of [the 8 December 1999 Union Treaty] are now ruining what has been created, [taking advantage of the fact that] President [Vladimir] Putin is absorbed in some way or other by events of recent months" Lukashenka said. He cited Moscow's reestablishment of customs controls on the Belarusian-Russian border as a development that impairs bilateral ties. Zyuganov assured Lukashenka that Russia's relations with Belarus are a "number one priority." "If we fail here, with whom else will Russia be able to build relations?" Lukashenka responded. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 31)

BELARUSIAN OFFICIAL SAYS OSCE FOUND 'COMPROMISE' ON ELECTION OBSERVERS... — Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Ural Latypau on 31 August said the decision that the previous day's OSCE conference took on Belarus's 15 October legislative polls was "a victory of good will, a compromise that opens way for international observation of the elections" (see "RFE/RL Newsline, 31 August 2000), RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. The OSCE decided to send a "limited technical assessment mission" to the elections to the Chamber of Representatives in Belarus. OSCE Minsk mission head Hans Georg Wieck told Reuters that the recommendations to send a truncated observation team were "a compromise allowing to continue democratization in Belarus with international involvement. This is neither a victory for the government, nor for the opposition." Wieck added that the recommendations must still be approved by the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 1)

...WHILE OPPOSITIONISTS DEEM OSCE DECISION '80 PERCENT' SUCCESS — Anatol Lyabedzka and Vintsuk Vyachorka, who spoke on behalf of the Belarusian opposition at the OSCE conference, said in Minsk on 31 August that they are satisfied with the OSCE's recommendations. "The main result [of the recommendations] is that there will be no international monitoring of the polls," RFE/RL's Belarusian Service quoted Lyabedzka as saying. Vyachorka said he disagrees with the point of the recommendations stating that "progress has been made in the four major fields related to the organization of democratic elections [in Belarus]." But he added that this formulation was the result of "frantic search for a compromise" during the conference. Lyabedzka and Vyachorka believe that the opposition scored "an 80-percent success" in its attempts to prevent the international community from recognizing Belarus's election process as democratic and fair. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 1)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT 'GRATEFUL' FOR ELECTION OBSERVERS' DECISION — Alyaksandr Lukashenka said on 1 September that he is " grateful to the Europeans" for deciding to send a limited technical assessment mission to the 15 October election polls in Belarus (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 31 August and 1 September 2000), Belarusian Television reported. Lukashenka added that "[the Europeans] resisted the frantic pressure from certain empires," apparently alluding to a U.S. appeal not to send any monitors to Belarus's "undemocratic" poll. Lukashenka noted, however, that "any resolution [of the OSCE] would be acceptable to us" because, he argued, the elections "will in any case be held according to our Belarusian laws." Meanwhile, the opposition Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces said that last week the state media distorted the OSCE resolution on election observers by reporting that Europe is to send full-fledged election monitors to Belarus.(RFE/RL Newsline, September 4)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LAUNCHES 'POPULAR REFERENDUM' TO COUNTER ELECTIONS — Five opposition parties that are boycotting the 15 October legislative poll have begun collecting signatures in support of the OSCE's four demands to democratize the electoral process in Belarus, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 6 September. The action is called "Popular Referendum" and is organized by the Belarusian Popular Front Party (PBNF), United Civic Party, the Social Democratic Party of Stanislau Shushkevich, the Women's Party "Hope," and some members of the Social Democratic Party of Mikalay Statkevich. "The main goal [of the action] is to explain to people the united opposition's stance [on the elections]," PBNF deputy chairman Viktar Ivashkevich commented. "The boycott will fail, it is ridiculous in a political, moral, and legal sense," presidential aide Syarhey Posakhau said. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 7)

SEVEN CANDIDATES TO COMPETE FOR EACH DEPUTY SEAT IN BELARUS — Central Electoral Commission Chairwoman Lidziya Yarmoshyna announced on 6 September that 769 people have filed documents to register for the 15 October elections to the 110-seat Chamber of Representatives, Belapan reported. Workers' collectives fielded 308 contenders, political parties 306, and groups of citizens 334 (some of the contenders were proposed by more than one group). The Belarusian Communist Party and the Liberal Democratic Party are the only opposition parties to officially nominate candidates for the ballot. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 7)

MINSK DENIES LUKASHENKA LEFT NEW YORK IN PROTEST — Presidential spokesman Mikalay Barysevich and Foreign Ministry spokesman Pavel Latushka denied on 7 September that Alyaksandr Lukashenka left the UN Millennium Summit in New York the previous day to protest his exclusion from the party organized by U.S. President Bill Clinton for the summit's participants. Some Russian media reported earlier that Clinton personally struck Lukashenka's name from the list of guests and that the latter left New York immediately after his address to the summit (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 7 September 2000). The spokesmen said Lukashenka left New York at the time he had earlier planned. Latushka added that Lukashenka met at the UN headquarters with heads of delegations from Algeria, Bangladesh, Turkey, and Iran. "We met with such important states that are able not only to support us but also to ask other states to support Belarus," Lukashenka commented on those meetings.(RFE/RL Newsline, September 8)

EUROPE TO SEND THREE TECHNICAL OBSERVERS TO BELARUSIAN POLLS — The Council of Europe and the European Parliament have approved the OSCE recommendations to send a limited technical assessment mission to the 15 October legislative elections in Belarus, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 8 September. Wolfgang Berendt of the Council of Europe told RFE/RL that the technical assessment mission will consist of himself, Jan Marinus Wiersma of the European Parliament, and, "most likely," Adrian Severin of the OSCE. The group is to arrive in Minsk three days before the ballot takes place and spend a total of five days there. Last week, OSCE Minsk mission head Hans Georg Wieck said that a final assessment of the elections in Belarus will be based on information gathered by his mission, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, and Belarus's NGO called the Central Coordinating Council for Monitoring Elections. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 11)

BELARUS' CENTRAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION EXPANDED WITH CONSULTING MEMBERS — President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has decreed that the Central Electoral Commission be expanded to include consultative representatives from the nine political parties that are fielding candidates in the 15 October elections to the Chamber of Representatives, Belarusian Television reported on 11 September. The nine appointees have no voting right on the commission and may only submit proposals and ask questions during the commission's sittings. In another decree, Lukashenka ordered that elections to the Council of the Republic, the second house of the National Assembly, take place from 13 September to 13 December. According to the constitution adopted in the controversial 1996 referendum, the soviets of the country's six oblasts and the city of Minsk will elect eight members each and the president will appoint the remaining eight members of the 64-seat Council of the Republic. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 12)

BELARUS' PRO-REGIME DEPUTIES CALL FOR ALLIANCE AGAINST OPPOSITION — Eleven deputies of the Chamber of Representatives who are seeking re-election have appealed in "Sovetskaya Belorussiya," the presidential mouthpiece, for a common election platform with other candidates who support President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The group praised Lukashenka for stopping the "decay and disintegration" of Belarus, adding that he "has managed to keep the country stable and controllable under most difficult circumstances." According to the group, the opposition plans to "seize power in the country, cease talking about democracy, and do away with the government of the people." For this reason, the group argued, Belarus needs a "strong army, equipped with modern weapons, as well as highly professional law enforcement agencies." The group appealed for "an adequate response to the aggression that some 'democrats' call 'humanitarian intervention.'" (RFE/RL Newsline, September 13)

OPPOSITION ACCUSES OSCE OF EXACERBATING SITUATION IN BELARUS — The opposition Conservative Christian Party, led by Zyanon Paznyak, said on 12 September that the OSCE's "contradictory" resolution on sending a technical assessment mission to the Belarusian polls "has seriously aggravated the political situation" in the country. According to the party, President Lukashenka saw the OSCE decision "as a concession on the part of the OSCE and the go-ahead for [his] antidemocratic policies." The party once again demanded the dismissal of Hans Georg Wieck, head of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus, saying the organization's decision on technical observers resulted from Wieck's "constant concessions to the Lukashenka regime." (RFE/RL Newsline, September 13

LUKASHENKA APPEARS CONCERNED ABOUT RE-ELECTION BID NEXT YEAR — President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 13 September discussed with his cabinet the 2001 budget and socioeconomic development in the coming year, Belarusian Television reported. Lukashenka said the government should do away with poverty in Belarus and charged his ministers with the task of increasing the average monthly wage to $100 by 1 October 2001 (it now stands at some $45). "Next year is a test for all of us--[we have] presidential elections. What will we say to the people?" Lukashenka commented, adding that Belarus's continuing poverty may prompt people to change those in power. He warned that such a change would spell disaster for Belarus. "[New rulers in Belarus] can be installed only by the West or the East. But they would have to pay for this with refineries, pipelines, airplanes and helicopters, and, generally, with the lives of our people," Lukashenka said. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 14)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER MAY NOT RUN IN ELECTION IN PROTEST — A Minsk district electoral commission has registered Mikalay Statkevich, leader of the opposition Social Democratic Party (Popular Assembly) (SDP), as a candidate in the legislative elections, RFE/RL's Service

reported on 14 September. Statkevich told journalists that regional electoral commissions registered only two out of the 16 SDP members seeking registration for the ballot. According to Statkevich, the authorities "intentionally" allowed him to run while excluding the other SDP members. Statkevich warned that unless the Central Electoral Commission or the Supreme Court rules that his colleagues must be registered, he will not run in the election. The SDP said the same day that none of its representatives has been included in regional electoral commissions. The party said it will join the other opposition parties in boycotting the poll if the authorities continue to violate legislation during the election campaign. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 15)

BHC LOSES ITS PROMINENT MEMBERS — On September 16, at the Assembly of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee (BHC), a Minsk-based NGO affiliated with the International Helsinki Federation, 25 organization's members terminated their membership, accusing BHC's leadership of pursuing personal political ambitions and having discredited the organization by deciding to run for the Belarusian National Assembly this fall, reported Belapan. Yury Khadyka, deputy chair of the BPF Adradzhenne, Alexander Potupa, vice-president of the Belarusian Association of Entrepreneurs, Vladimir Khalip and Yury Khashchevatsky, both prominent Belarusian filmmakers, view the BHC leadership's involvement in the fall election as providing assistance to the regime in achieving its purpose of legitimization in the eyes of the international community and intend to set up a new human rights organization called Helsinki-XXI [21st Century]. "The BHC's transformation into a small collaborationist party is a serious blow to the development of civil society in Belarus," the group said in a statement. "It is a deplorable fact that the human rights organization itself has become a generator of human rights violations," they said. (Belapan, September 17)

LUKASHENKA SAYS AUTHORITIES REGISTERED 'ALL' OPPOSITION CANDIDATES FOR ELECTIONS... — Lukashenka said in Zhodzina that he is "very grateful" to the Central Electoral Commission for registering "all [opposition] candidates, even those who did not want [to be registered]." According to Lukashenka, some "significant oppositionists" failed to collect the required 1,000 signatures, but regional electoral commissions registered them all the same in order to avoid accusations that the authorities are suppressing the opposition. Belapan, however, reported on 15 September that electoral commissions, citing irregularities in registration documents, refused to register a majority of some 60 democratic opposition candidates, including independent trade union leader Alyaksandr Bukhvostau and 10 out of the 16 candidates of the Social Democratic Party. It is unclear whether former Premier Mikhail Chyhir will be allowed to run, since a Minsk district electoral commission has postponed his registration. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 18)

MANY OPPOSITION CANDIDATES REFUSED REGISTRATION — On September 18, Mikhail Myasnikovich, head of the Lukashenko administration, told diplomats accredited in Minsk that the authorities created "absolutely equal conditions" for all candidates running for the parliament, reported Interfax. But the words of Mikhail Myasnikovich contradict with reality, which surpassed worst expectations of the democratic opposition. Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta, an independent weekly, reported on September 19 that 41 out of 58 representatives of the democratic opposition have been denied registration. The list of rejected candidates include Oleg Volchek, director of the Public Legal Aid Association, Gary Pogonyailo, prominent Belarusian human rights advocate, who left the Belarusian Helsinki Committee to participate in the October 15 election, Julia Chigir, wife of Mikhail Chigir, Nina Stuzhinskaya, deputy chair of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party, Gennady Grushevoi, president of the Children of Chernobyl Foundation, Vladimir Basharimov, a leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party, Tatyana Vanina, chair of the movement of the Belarusian Women For the Revival of the Fatherland, Vladimir Goncharik, chair of the Belarusian Federation of Trade Unions, Gennady Muratov, ex-chair of the Vitebsk branch of the United Civic Party, Leonid Zlotnikov, an expert at the Institute of Social, Economic and Political Studies, and others.

The official reasons for denial of registration sounded similar in all cases. The district electoral commissions that considered the applications refused registration on the pretext that applicants failed to submit the required number of valid signatures or copies of their tax returns. In some cases, no specific reason for refusal was given. "We should elect a professional parliament, not a class of bad students, who cannot even file the necessary documents," Yermoshina said. Only six out of 16 members of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party have been registered. Nikolai Statkevich, BSDP chair, called it a "wanton slaughter" of the Party's candidates. Although Statkevich himself was registered, he intends to withdraw his candidacy if the rejected BSDP members are not allowed to participate in the parliamentary race. "I am not going to help Lukashenko to create a democratic facade for the vote," Statkevich said in an interview to Belapan. Vasily Shlyndikov, deputy chair of the United Civic Party, told a news conference that the authorities refused the registration to "the most educated and well-prepared for the parliamentary work opposition activists." "Now, we have no alternative but to join the boycott of the election, while supporting those who has not been weeded by the regime," he added. (Belapan, BDG, Interfax, September 18-19)

LUKASHENKA EXPLAINS WHY OPPOSITION SEEKS LEGISLATIVE SEATS — "Why are [oppositionists] running for this parliament? Most likely, it has not been too sweet for them in the West, they have had to work hard for the money [they received from the West]. And here salaries are pretty high and nobody has so far overstrained himself [in the Chamber of Representatives]," Lukashenka said in Zhodzina the same day. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 18)

BELARUS CONCLUDES REGISTRATION OF ELECTION CANDIDATES — Central Electoral Commission Chairwoman Lidziya Yarmoshyna said on 18 September that Belarus's district electoral commissions have registered 551 candidates for the 15 October legislative elections, while denying registration to 221 people, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. Yarmoshyna noted that the commissions registered some opposition figures while "turning a blind eye to some shortcomings" in the lists of signatures and other documents presented by candidates for registration. According to her, Belarus's legislation is "sufficiently flexible" to allow such a practice. She said the documents presented by former Premier Mikhail Chyhir and his wife, Yuliya, included "approximately the same deficiencies and mistakes" but only the former was registered as a candidate. Another example of Belarus's "legislation flexibility," according to Yarmoshyna, is the ban on election boycotts in the Administrative Offenses Code and the lack of such a ban in the Electoral Code. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 19)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONIST SAYS PEOPLE 'LEFT NO REAL CHOICE' IN ELECTIONS — Vasil Shlyndzikau, deputy chairman of the opposition United Civic Party, told Belapan on 18 September that district electoral commissions registered only 17 out of the 58 democratic candidates seeking registration in the 15 October legislative elections. "In es-

sence, the authorities have left no real choice for the people," Shlyndzikau commented. He refused to name the candidates who, in his opinion, represent the democratic camp and are seeking legislative mandates. Shlyndzikau said the opposition should support those 17 candidates and campaign for an election boycott in the constituencies where no democratic candidate is running. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 19)

OSCE TECHNICAL MISSION TO LEAVE BELARUS ON ELECTION DAY — Gerard Stoudmann, director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, announced in Minsk on 20 September that the OSCE technical assessment mission will leave Belarus on 15 October, the day on which elections to the Chamber of Representatives are to take place, Belapan reported (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 20 September 2000). Stoudmann met with government officials and representatives of the Belarusian opposition during his one-day trip to Minsk. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 21)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT APPOINTS INTERIOR MINISTER, SECURITY CHIEF — Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 25 September appointed Uladzimir Navumau as interior minister and promoted him to the rank of major general, Belarusian Television reported. Lukashenka also appointed Major General Leanid Yeryn--who until now was first deputy chairman of the Belarusian KGB--as chief of the presidential security service, the position vacated by Navumau. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 26)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT BLAMES MOSCOW FOR LACK OF GREATER UNITY — Alyaksandr Lukashenka said on 26 September that "too many" officials in the Russian government are against a union between Belarus and Russia, Belapan reported. Speaking on Russian Television, Lukashenka compared anti-union politicians to the opposition in Belarus. "We have [oppositionists] in the streets, throwing rocks at police. You [Russia] have them at various levels of government." Lukashenka added that the West is afraid that a union between Russia and Belarus would be hard to control, so "they have divided us and are trying to rule and domineer us." The Belarusian president said he will put the union question "point-blank" to the Moscow-based Supreme Council of the Belarusian-Russian Union at its next session in November. He said such a union must be "equal in all respects." (RFE/RL Newsline, September 27)

BELARUSIAN SUPREME COURT REJECTS APPEALS BY WOULD-BE CANDIDATES — The Belarusian Supreme Court upheld a decision by district election commissions not to allow several candidates to register for the upcoming parliamentary elections, Belapan reported on 27 September. The court's press office said that of 63 appeals filed, 59 had been rejected, including those of human rights activists Oleh Volchek and Valery Shchukin; Yuliya Chyhir, wife of former Premier Mikhail Chyhir; Vladimir Honcharik, chairman of the Federation of Trade Unions; and Hennadi Hrushevoi, president of the For the Children of Chornobyl foundation. The reasons given for most of the rejections were invalid signatures in registration lists or inaccuracies in income and property statements. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 28)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER TO STAY IN RACE FOR PARLIAMENT — Mikalay Statkevich, the leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party, said on 28 September that he will still stand as a deputy for parliament, despite an earlier pledge to withdraw if fellow party members were denied registration, Belapan reported. Statkevich said the nine that have been denied registration by the state as candidates have urged him to continue his campaign. Statkevich said he realizes that government officials will use his participation to argue that the elections are fair and free but said "if we do not participate in an unfair election, we will get nothing." (RFE/RL Newsline, September 29)

OSCE ELECTION EXPERTS BEGIN WORK IN BELARUS — A technical mission of election experts from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights has begun its work in Belarus, Belapan reported on 19 September. Mission head Elisabeth Rasmusson said the experts' goal is not to monitor the elections but to assess the election campaign, the behavior of the media, and the situation with human rights on the eve of the elections. Europe will also dispatch three representatives of its "parliamentary troika" to monitor the 15 October ballot (see "RFE/RL's Newsline," 11 September 2000). Meanwhile, Supreme Soviet Chairman Syamyon Sharetski, currently in exile in Lithuania, has called on the OSCE to cancel its decision to send technical observers to Belarus. Sharetski said the Minsk regime is presenting the OSCE technical experts to Belarusians as full-fledged monitors, thus creating the impression that Europe considers the 15 October elections lawful.(RFE/RL Newsline, September 20)

BELARUS-RUSSIA UNION ADVANCES BACKWARD — Last week, Belarus took a decisive step backward in its integration with Russia when it announced it is reintroducing customs checkpoints on the Russian border as of 1 October. The action applies to commodity shipments by third countries, while the movement of Russian shipments will continue to be free. The Belarusian side says the move is in response to the similar measure taken by Russia earlier this year (see "RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report," 18 April 2000). Russia reintroduced customs control on the border with Belarus after it had become apparent that owing to lower Belarusian duties, many exporters to Russia brought their commodities to Belarus, paid customs duties there, and subsequently reshipped those commodities for sale in Russia. Moscow said it suffered heavy losses owing to this practice and resolved to put an end to it. "Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta" reported on 20 September that following the Russian move, the shipment of goods from Russia to Belarus has remained at the previous level, while from Belarus to Russia have fallen threefold. This means, the newspaper concluded, that Belarus's revenues from customs duties have fallen by approximately the same factor. "Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta" also reported that Moscow has more unpleasant surprises for Minsk in store: Russia is soon to simplify the rules for collecting customs duties on some 2,000 commodity items. The Belarusian newspaper commented: "The point of the Customs Union for our country was in the fact that our duties would be lower, while the system of levying customs tariffs simpler. It has become clear in the end that Russia will not make any concessions [to Belarus in the sphere of customs regulations], so Belarus's State Customs Committee finally decided to reestablish customs checkpoints." There have been no customs checkpoints on the Belarusian-Russian border since 1995, when Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and then Russian Premier Viktor Chernomyrdin dug out a border pole in a symbolic ceremony that was broadly publicized in both countries' media. "Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta" reported that Minsk is planning no ceremony for repositioning the former border poles. (RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report, September 29)

CANDIDATES DENIED REGISTRATION SAY BELARUS HAS NO REAL CHOICE — A group of democratic candidates who had wanted to contest legislative seats on an independent ticket in the 15 October elections said they were denied registration for "far-fetched reasons," Belapan reported on 5 October. "The authorities have eliminated from the election campaign those candidates who could hamper

the election of [government] proteges [and] have deprived the voters of the possibility to vote for change in the country, for the development of a market economy and democracy," the group said in a statement published in "Nasha volya." The group includes Children of Chornobyl Charitable Fund head Henadz Hrushavy, lawyer Hary Pahanyayla, human rights activist Aleh Volchak, and economist Leanid Zlotnikau. Meanwhile, presidential aide Syarhey Posakhau told the 4 October "Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta" that "most opposition candidates" have been registered and mentioned four names: Alyaksandr Fyaduta, Mikhail Chyhir, Mikalay Statkevich, and Uladzimir Navasyad. (RFE/RL Newsline, October 6)

BELARUSIAN PROVINCES GET READY FOR ANTI-ELECTION PROTEST — The Belarusian opposition is planning to hold rallies in 23 cities on 8 October to demand democratic elections and protest the 15 October legislative ballot, which it calls an "election farce." RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported that the authorities have given permission for rallies to be held in Hrodna, Slonim, Navapolatsk, Slutsk, Zhodzina, Homel, Rechytsa, Mazyr, and Zhlobin. However, they have banned protest actions in Svetlahorsk, Rahachou, and Baranavichy. The Svetlahorsk authorities said they will permit a rally to take place if the organizers change the nature of the protest. The Rahachou authorities said that rally organizers have already made known their position on the elections in leaflets and that there is no need to hold a rally in the city. (RFE/RL Newsline, October 6)

HUMAN RIGHTS

ORT CAMERAMAN DISAPPEARS AT BELARUS AIRPORT — Dmitrii Zavadskii, a cameraman from Russian Public Television, disappeared on 7 July, ITAR-TASS reported. He was supposed to meet his colleague Pavel Sheremet at the airport but did not show up. Sheremet and Zavadskii were jailed for more than two months in Belarus in 1998. Sheremet told the media on 9 July that he suspects Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka "could not forgive Zavadskii for quitting when he worked as the president's personal cameraman." Belarusian officials said the country's opposition might have kidnapped him to blacken Belarus's international reputation, but the opposition blames the Belarusian secret services for Zavadskii's disappearance. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 10)

ORT SEEKS MOSCOW'S AID IN FINDING JOURNALIST IN BELARUS — Russian Public Television on 10 July asked the Russian authorities to help find Dmitrii Zavadskii, a network cameraman who has been missing since 7 July, Belapan reported. Meanwhile, Belarusian police continued their investigation, and the office of Belarusian leader Alyaksandr Lukashenka denied any knowledge of Zavadskii's whereabouts, AP reported. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 11)

BELARUS WANTS TO LOOK FOR MISSING CAMERAMAN WITHOUT MEDIA 'INTERFERENCE.' — The Belarusian embassy in Moscow has released a statement saying that the Belarusian authorities are doing everything possible to find Dzmitry Zavadski, a cameraman for Russian Public Television (ORT), who disappeared at Minsk airport on 7 July. The statement also rejected the allegation that Zavadski was kidnapped by Belarus's secret services. "Zavadski is a Belarusian citizen, and the state itself, without interference from media that are doing nothing concrete to help the investigation but are only fomenting tension, is able to deal with the situation," the statement noted. ORT journalist Pavel Sheremet, whom Zavadski was to meet on 7 July, has said he fears that the Belarusian secret police have kidnapped Zavadski. Many independent commentators in Russia and Belarus share this apprehension, pointing to the former unsolved disappearances of Belarusian oppositionists. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 21)

DEFECTOR SAYS HE WAS PRESSED TO COMPROMISE BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION... — RL's Belarusian Service reported on 19 July that former Belarusian police officer Aleh Baturyn, who received asylum in Poland, was kidnapped in Poland by Belarusian special services and transported back to Minsk. Baturyn quit his job at the Interior Ministry in February, accusing it of provoking clashes with the opposition (see "RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report," 15 February 2000). On 21 July, Belarusian Television quoted Baturyn as saying from the U.S. embassy in Minsk: "What was voiced by Radio Liberty is not true. I have never said that I was kidnapped by the Belarusian secret service." A U.S. embassy official told Belapan later that Baturyn had been forced to make that statement in exchange for his safe return to Poland. Baturyn told Belapan from Warsaw on 23 July that he was kidnapped by unknown assailants in Poland and pressed to make compromising statements about the Belarusian opposition and the U.S. embassy in Minsk. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 24)

...WHILE PRESIDENTIAL AIDE SAYS BATURYN'S CASE 'MONSTROUS PROVOCATION.' — Presidential aide Syarhey Posakhau told Belarusian Television on 22 July that Baturyn's defection and his reappearance in Belarus constituted a "monstrous provocation" planned by "special services" to "provoke dissatisfaction within Belarus, among the people, and...portray Belarus as a police state." Posakhau failed to name which special services were responsible for the alleged provocation but suggested that Belarusian oppositionists Syamyon Sharetski, Stanislau Shushkevich, and Mechaslau Hryb might have "actively participated" in it. "The situation surrounding the so-called 'kidnapping' of Baturyn is yet another example of how some circles within the country and outside it are trying to inflame the situation in the republic, including making the Belarusian authorities and the national special services responsible for disappearances of people," the Belarusian KGB said in a statement. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 24)

LUKASHENKA ACCUSES ORT OF HIDING INFORMATION ABOUT MISSING CAMERAMAN — Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 21 July accused Russian Public Television (ORT) of concealing information about its cameraman Dzmitry Zavadski, who disappeared in Minsk earlier this month. "You should tell many things about Zavadski. I know what I'm saying," Belarusian Television quoted Lukashenka as telling an ORT journalist in Minsk. According to Lukashenka, ORT has been offered money for Zavadski's release and not reported on this fact. Lukashenka denied that Belarus's special services are responsible for Zavadski's disappearance and pledged "to wring the necks" of those responsible for the cameraman's disappearance. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 24)

LUKASHENKA'S TOP AIDE SAYS BATURYN'S CASE STAGED BY OPPOSITION... — Mikhail Myasnikovich, head of the presidential administration, told Interfax on 22 July that the case of former police officer Aleh Baturyn (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 24 July 2000) was staged by the Belarusian opposition "with direct assistance from foreign sponsors." Myasnikovich said the case demonstrated that "the so-called abductions of opposition politicians in Belarus are simply sabotage staged by the forces opposing the political course pursued by the Belarusian leadership." However, the Foreign Ministry's spokesman said on 24 July that the authorities have no evidence that foreign special services were involved in Baturyn's transfer from Warsaw to Minsk. Mean-

while, the same day Belarusian Television quoted Yauhen Novikau, whom it described as a human right activist, as saying that U.S. Ambassador to Belarus Daniel Speckhard was personally involved in Baturyn's case, which Novikau described as a "provocation against [Belarus's] prestige."(RFE/RL Newsline, July 25)

...WHILE OPPOSITION LEADER SUGGESTS OTHERWISE — Vintsuk Vyachorka, leader of the Belarusian Popular Front, told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service on 24 July that the cases of Aleh Baturyn and Russian Public Television (ORT) cameraman Dzmitry Zavadski "have certain traits of planned scenarios that in terms of their scale and provocative content exceed those [scenarios] carried out by the Lukashenka regime earlier." Vyachorka added that either the regime has now acquired more experienced advisers or the current "cynical scenarios" are prepared by advisers from Russia. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 25)

ORT JOURNALISTS DENY CONCEALING INFORMATION ABOUT MISSING COLLEAGUE — ORT journalists Pavel Sheremet and Dmitrii Novozhilov have denied the allegation by Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka that ORT is concealing information about the disappearance of ORT cameraman Dzmitry Zavadski (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 24 July 2000). They said all information obtained by ORT in Zavadski's case was immediately passed on to Belarusian investigators. Sheremet added that he will arrive in Minsk on 25 July with an ORT "investigation team" to look for Zavadski in Belarus. Citing unofficial sources, Belapan reported that Belarus's prosecutors intend to launch a criminal case against Sheremet for slander. Sheremet earlier said that Belarus's special services and Lukashenka personally are responsible for Zavadski's disappearance.(RFE/RL Newsline, July 25)

MINSK COURT REJECTS APPEAL BY IMPRISONED OPPOSITION DEPUTY — The Minsk City Court on 23 August rejected an appeal by Supreme Soviet Deputy Andrey Klimau and his two business associates to overrule the verdict whereby they were handed down prison sentences, Belapan reported. Klimau, arrested in February 1998, received a six-year sentence in March for embezzlement and forgery. Many Belarusian commentators regard that verdict as politically motivated. Before the controversial 1996 constitutional referendum, Klimau belonged to the most vocal of Lukashenka's critics and signed a motion to impeach him. "I have realized that the authorities want Klimau's physical destruction. He was tortured and beaten in his cell, he was refused...medical care, he was sent to hospital only following the intervention of an international organization, and now [there is] this unjust verdict and the refusal to change it," Klimau's mother told RFE/RL. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 24)

SUPREME COURT REVOKES PRISON TERMS FOR TWO BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONISTS — Belarus's Supreme Court on 25 August granted a request by Social Democratic Party leader Mikalay Statkevich and Supreme Soviet deputy Valery Shchukin to annul their prison sentences and send their case to the Minsk City Court for retrial by a different panel of judges, Belapan reported. In June, the court handed down Statkevich a two-year suspended sentence and Shchukin a one-year suspended sentence for participation in unauthorized street protests last year. Both politicians are planning to take part in the 15 October legislative elections. Had their appeal been rejected, they would have ceased to be eligible to run. The Supreme Court agreed with the defendants that the lower court's verdict was based on inadmissible evidence and that their misdemeanors are punishable under the Administrative Offenses Code rather than the Criminal Code. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 28)

ACTIVISTS ARRESTED FOR DISTRIBUTING OPPOSITION LEAFLETS — The Belarusian Electoral Code currently in force does not prohibit campaigning for an election boycott (such appeals are explicitly prohibited only on the day of election). But the Belarusian authorities have found it easy to violate the law. Belapan reported on September 4 that Alexander Kondukov, a student of the Belarusian State University, was fined for passing out election boycott leaflets.

On September 8, opposition activists Alexey Androsov and Gennady Prikhodko were detained by the police as they were placing "Boycott-2000" leaflets in the mailboxes of an apartment building, reported Viasna 96 Human Rights Center. The activists were brought to the nearest police station and accused of violating the rules of public sanitation under Art. 143, para. 3 of the Belarusian Administrative Code. A police report was filed on them.

On September 11, Zoya Charopka was detained in Yanka Kupala park in Minsk, while collecting signatures required by law to initiate a nationwide referendum in support of the four requirements established by the OSCE for a free and democratic vote in Belarus. The opposition activist was charged with an administrative offense, taken to the Tsentralny police station, and released after two hours.

On September 14, Alexander Karizna, a pensioner who was at one time a victim of Stalin's repression, was detained while putting a special issue of Rabochy into the mail boxes of residents of the Vostok (East), residential area in Minsk, reported BPF Adradzhenne press service. He was attacked by three policemen, forced into their car and taken to the Pervomaisky District Department of Internal Affairs where he spent about half an hour.

On September 2-3, police detained about ten teenage boys for passing out election boycott leaflets. They were accused of violating the rules of public sanitation, brought to the police station, and released after two hours. The law-enforcers threatened the youth that they would be expelled from their schools and forced them to write in an explanatory note that they were allegedly paid for distributing the leaflets. (Belapan, Viasna 96, BPF, September 4-14)

... AUTHORITIES BAN FESTIVAL OF INDEPENDENT PRESS — Continuing its pattern of suppression of the independent media, the authorities banned what was to be the first-ever Festival of the Belarusian Independent Press, which was scheduled to coincide with the anniversary of the Belarusian Association of Journalists and the International Day of Journalists' Solidarity, reported the Belarusian Association of Journalists. The event was to take place on September 8-9.(BAJ, September 4)

BELARUSIAN STUDENT FINED OVER CALL TO BOYCOTT ELECTIONS — A Minsk court has fined Alyaksandr Kadukou, a student at the Belarusian State University, for distributing leaflets calling for a boycott of the 15 October legislative polls, Belapan reported on 4 September. Kadukou told the agency that Belarusian Television filmed his interrogation by a police officer, despite his protests. Kadukou added that the officer urged him to confess in front of television camera that he had been well paid by the opposition to distribute the leaflets. The court found Kadukou guilty of violating legislation on elections. The Electoral Code currently in force, however, does not prohibit campaigning for an election boycott. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 5)

BELARUSIAN EX-PREMIER FACES MORE CHARGES — The authorities have instituted criminal proceedings against former Premier Mikhail Chyhir for alleged tax evasion when he worked for a German concern in Moscow after quitting his cabinet post in 1996, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. Chyhir told RFE/RL that he has paid all taxes, adding that the new charges seek to obstruct his election cam-

paign for a seat in the Chamber of Representatives. Chyhir has already received a three-year suspended sentence for abuse of office but has appealed the verdict. Independent commentators say both the old and new charges against Chyhir are trumped up and aim at eliminating him as a potentially dangerous challenger to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in next year's presidential ballot.(RFE/RL Newsline, September 6)

BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES FOIL INDEPENDENT PRESS FESTIVAL — The Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) said on 5 September that the authorities have committed "yet another discrimination act" against the independent media by seeking to thwart plans for a festival of the non-state press, which was scheduled to take place in Vitsebsk on 8-9 September, Belapan reported. The Vitsebsk authorities initially agreed that the BAJ could hold the festival in a local community center but four days before the event was due to start said the festival venue is not available. The BAJ has not abandoned its festival plans and says the event will take place in Minsk later this month. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 6)

AUTHORITIES CANCEL GAY FESTIVAL — Nasha Svaboda, an independent newspaper, reported that the Minsk City Council banned a gay and lesbian parade scheduled for September 7-10 in Minsk. On September 7, under pressure from the Lukashenko administration, the owners of the Aquarium night club, where the representatives of the Belarusian sexual minorities and their guests from Sweden, France, Germany, Poland, Ukraine, and Russia were supposed to start the celebration, turned off the electricity. All present were ordered to leave the premises. Outside the club they were met by heavy armed police. The Minsk authorities cut off telephone service to the sponsor's headquarters and forced the cancellation of some film screenings, and seminars at the European Humanitarian University. Eduard Tarletsky, chair of the Belarusian League for Freedom of Sexual Minorities and the key-organizer of the Belarusian Gay Pride 2000, commented that the officials in Belarus "do not know how to handle us." Tarletsky plans on taking the issue to court. The paper notes that Belarus has not traditionally been a leader in the cause for gay rights. It was only in 1993 that Art. 121, para. 2 of the Belarusian criminal code was liberalized, to decriminalize homosexuality for those over the age of 18. The law had previously punished open homosexuality by a prison sentence of up to five years. Gays and lesbians, however, are still automatically barred from army service. After being called to service, those who claim to be homosexuals must undergo humiliating psychiatric examinations. Recently, at a meeting with the chiefs of the FM radio-stations, Vladimir Zametalin, first deputy chief of the presidential administration, said that homosexuals are "not worth talking about publicly because they do not exist in Belarus." The radio stations were warned that if they support the gay parade, they will be closed. (Nasha Svaboda, September 12)

LOCAL AUTHORITIES BAN MUSIC CONCERT THEN RELENT AFTER PROTEST — Faithful to its commitment to curtail and belittle the Belarusian language, the Lukashenko regime continues to discriminate against people speaking their native Belarusian language. Nasha Svaboda, an independent newspaper, reported on September 12 that the Gorky City Council banned the concert of the Zhyvy Huk (Live Sound), a music group advertised in the Belarusian language, and ordered local police to swiftly remove the posters with information about the cultural event. But a strong disapproval of the authorities' decision was expressed by the city residents, caused the city authorities to overcome their intense hatred for the mother tongue and lift the ban. (Nasha Svaboda, September 12)

BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES THREATEN IMPRISONMENT OVER ELECTION BOYCOTT — Mikhail Sukhinin, a department chief at the Justice Ministry, told Reuters on 11 September that calls to boycott the 15 October legislative polls can be regarded as an attempt to "hamper the right to vote guaranteed by the constitution." He added that "law enforcement bodies, if they want, may qualify this as a criminal act." His aide said that under the law such actions are punishable by up to two years in jail. The opposition responded by saying the authorities aim to intimidate the population by such statements. "We are confident that we are acting according to the law," Viktar Ivashkevich, an organizer of the boycott campaign, told the news agency. Opposition activists currently visit private households, asking citizens to boycott the vote and distributing leaflets featuring a kissing couple along with the headline "No to Farce!" (RFE/RL Newsline, September 12)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONIST DENIED REGISTRATION AS ELECTION CANDIDATE — A district electoral commission in Polatsk, Vitsebsk Oblast, has refused to register Valery Shchukin as a candidate in the 15 October elections to the Chamber of the Representatives, Belapan reported on 12 September. Supreme Soviet deputy Shchukin is a well-known opponent of the regime, who has often been arrested and fined for his opposition activities. The commission said it denied Shchukin registration because he failed to collect at least 1,000 valid signatures in his support and to provide a declaration of his income. Shchukin rejected both claims and announced he will appeal to the Central Electoral Commission. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 13)

BELARUSIAN POLICE CONFISCATE NEWSPAPER URGING ELECTION BOYCOTT — Police on 13 September confiscated 112,000 copies of a special issue of the newspaper "Rabochy" (Worker), the organ of the Belarusian Free Trade Union, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. Police officers said they seized the issue because it includes appeals to boycott the 15 October legislative elections. "Rabochy" chief editor Viktor Ivashkevich, the newspaper's legal adviser, and the owner of the printing house where the newspaper is printed are to stand trial on 18 September on charges of "propagandizing an election boycott." Ivashkevich dismisses the charges as groundless, saying the Electoral Code does not prohibit boycotting elections in Belarus. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 14)

AUTHORITIES BAN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL CARAVAN — Viasna Human Rights Center reported that the authorities banned the Next Stop-New Century, an international educational caravan scheduled for September 8-10 in Grodno and Mogilev, which was organized by Next Stop-New Life, a Belarusian youth NGO in cooperation with Quest for Peace, a Swedish NGO. In late August, the State Committee of Youth Affairs informed the organizers that they should apply to local authorities for a permission to stage the festive. Upholding a deep-rooted tradition of hypocrisy cherished by the regime, the Committee at the same time sent a letter to the local City Councils, " advising them not to support the caravan. (Viasna, September 15)

MASS DETENTIONS OF OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS IN MINSK — Nasha Svaboda, an independent newspaper, reported that on September 15-16, the first day of the election campaign, in accordance with Art. 45 of the Belarusian Electoral Code whereby citizens are allowed to agitate for or against the candidates during the election campaign, representatives of the united democratic opposition held a series of public meetings with voters in different parts of Minsk. The organizers had submitted the proper applications to the District Departments of Internal Affairs, informing the au-

thorities about the time and place of the meetings. Although such gatherings are not prohibited by election legislation, however, all of them were forcefully disrupted by the police. According to Viasna Human Rights Center, about two dozen opposition activists were detained on September 15-16 and brought to police stations around the city for calling on Belarusian citizens to boycott the October 15 election and for distributing opposition printed materials. Among them were Pavel Znavets and Ludmila Gryaznova, both deputies of the 13th Supreme Soviet; Lyavon Barshchewski and Lyavon Sadowsky, BPF activists; Yevgeny Afnagel, activist of the Malady Front; Zoya Chila, Vladimir Kishkurny, Marina Sinitsyna, Sergei Karbovski, Sergei Shinkevich, Valentin Gatovkin, Timofei Akudovich, a minor, Valery Zherbin, Sergei Mohnov, Maxim Abramchuk, a minor, Pavel Ukhnevich, a minor, Valentin Golubev, Alexander Petrov, Nikita Sasim, Nikolai Markovnik, Leonid Kazakov, Sergei Alfer, Andrei Bazhanov. All detainees were videotaped and received court summons. Some of them have also been beaten and searched. Gennady Barbarich, Belapan correspondent, and Vladimir Glod, Radio Liberty journalist, were detained along with Pavel Znavets, 13th Supreme Soviet deputy, and forcefully transported to the Leninski District Internal Affairs Directorate. They were forbidden to inform their editorial offices, relatives, or friends about their detention, and released in a few hours.

On September 19, the Leninski District Court of Minsk acquitted Pavel Znavets, who was charged with holding an unauthorized picket marking the first anniversary of Gonchar's and Krasovsky's abduction, reported Charter 97. In the courtroom, the deputy insisted that since the action participants did not pass out any printed materials did not chant any anti-governmental slogans, it should not be regarded as picketing.

On September 21, the Tsentralny District Court fined Lyavon Barshchewski 13,000 BYR (about $13) for an alleged "violation of the electoral legislation" under Art. 167, para. 3 of the Belarusian Administrative Code. Trials of other opposition activists have been postponed. (Viasna, Nasha Svaboda, Charter 97, September 18-20)

BSDP HEADQUARTERS IN MINSK BURGLARIZED BY ARMED INTRUDERS — On September 21, armed raiders burglarized the Minsk headquarters of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party, reported Charter 97. In a midnight break-in, two men rushed into the BSDP's office, took $6,000 in cash, removed hard drives from computers, and seized the membership lists, and party literature. Three party members and a security guard were forced to lie on the floor. On September 22, Nikolai Statkevich, BSDP's chair, accused the regime of masterminding the robbery. He believes that the party member lists, kept secret from the authorities, appeared to be the main goal of the raid, he said. (Charter 97, September 22)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONIST ACCUSES AUTHORITIES OF 'STATE TERRORISM.' — Social Democratic Party leader Mikalay Statkevich on 22 September said the raid on his party's headquarters the previous day was carried out by special services (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 22 September 2000). "I'm confident that this is an act of state terrorism connected with the participation of the party's members in the elections," Belarusian Television quoted Statkevich as saying. Acting Interior Minister Mikhail Udovikau suggested the following day that the party itself may have staged attack on its headquarters in order to gain publicity.(RFE/RL Newsline, September 25)

ECONOMY

IMF CALLS FOR TIGHTER MONETARY POLICY IN BELARUS — Noting the strengthening of the Belarusian currency, Marta de Costello-Branco, the deputy head of the western section of the IMF's Second European Department, told Belarusian Prime Minister Yarmoshyn on 1 July that his government should do more to tighten monetary and credit policies an begin structural reforms, Interfax-West reported. She also called on the government to reduce its interference in the activities of commercial banks(RFE/RL Newsline, July 3)

IMF MISSION TO BELARUS URGES SPEEDY REFORMS — An International Monetary Fund monitoring mission urged the Belarusian government to implement further structural reforms. The mission praised a tighter monetary policy pursued by the National Bank since the beginning of the year, but said that the pace of current reform is too slow. The Fund's recommendations for Belarus, however, are in conflict with those of the government. Alexander Lukashenko, a firm advocate of a "socially oriented" economy with strong government supervision, reiterated recently that he had no intention to remove rigid state controls. "We count only on ourselves," Lukashenko announced in a televised address to the nation broadcast on July 2. "The chosen model of a socially oriented market economy, already known as the Belarusian way, makes us confident in tomorrow," the Belarusian leader told his compatriots. The mission discussed no loans during its visit. The Fund froze financing to the country in 1996 and recalled its representative in 1998 to protest against the slow pace of reforms. Liberalization of financial markets, less state intervention in the economy, fewer price controls, a tighter budget policy, and large-scale privatization are the key terms set by the IMF to start loan talks with Belarus. IMF experts said they did not see how Belarus and Russia could possibly pursue a unified financial policy after eventually forming a planned "union state." (Reuters, July 3)

U.S. ENDS DUTY FREE ACCESS FOR BELARUSIAN GOODS — U.S. Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky announced on 3 July that President Bill Clinton has suspended the benefits that Belarus received under the Generalized System of Preferences for the world's poorest countries, Reuters reported. To get these privileges, she said, "a country is taking steps to provide internationally recognized worker rights. Unfortunately, the government of Belarus continues to suppress trade union rights and harass union leaders." Belarusian President Lukashenka said that his country will lose S1 million as a result of the suspension. And in a speech in Vitebsk on 5 July, Lukashenka said "Clinton will not be president tomorrow and I give him this $1 million as an addition to his pension," ITAR-TASS reported. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 7)

U.S. SUSPENDS GSP BENEFITS FOR BELARUS OVER WORKER RIGHTS — On July 3, Ambassador Charlene Barshefsky, U.S. Trade Representative, announced that President Clinton had decided to suspend Belarus's benefits under the trade privilege called Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). The GSP provides tariff exemptions for developing countries to encourage developing economies. This decision was based on a finding by an interagency committee, chaired by Barshefsky, that Belarus had not taken sufficient steps to conform to internationally recognized labor rights. In 1999, the value of duty-free imports from Belarus amounted to $26.7 million. "One of the fundamental criteria for GSP eligibility is the evidence that a country is taking steps to provide internationally recognized worker

rights," Amb.. Barshefsky said. "We have, for some time, been reviewing worker rights issues in Belarus, namely, the freedom of association and the right to organize and bargain collectively. Unfortunately, the Government of Belarus continues to suppress trade union rights and harass union leaders. We therefore recommended that Belarus be suspended from the GSP." In 1997, the AFL-CIO filed a petition with the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative to remove Belarus from the GSP list. "As written, the Constitution of Belarus upholds the right of workers to form and join independent unions on a voluntary basis and to carry out actions, including the right to strike, in defense of their rights. These rights, however, are not respected in practice, and independent trade unions are suppressed," Barshefsky said. On July 7, State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher pointed out that the suspension of the GSP benefits does not have to be permanent and the U.S. is prepared to restore those benefits once Belarus makes substantial progress toward ensuring respect for internationally recognized worker rights. In follow-up questions to U.S. officials, ILHR determined that no other country is losing GSP this year due to workers' rights violations, although several African and East European countries are graduating from this status intended for poorer developing countries. (USIA, July 3-7; ILHR July 6)

LUKASHENKO OUTRAGED — "By suspending the GSP benefits for Belarus, the U.S. has deprived our country, the primary victim of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, of about $1 million," Lukashenko told Interfax. "Give that million to Clinton to supplement his pension," he scoffed. (Interfax, July 5-10)

MINSK WORRIED BY GROWTH IN CONSUMER DEBT — The Belarusian Council of Ministers on 11 July noted its concern over the growth in consumer debt owing to outstanding payments for gas, electricity, and heat, Belapan reported. The government directed the authorities to take "urgent measures" to ensure prompt payments for current consumption as well as the rapid payment of the existing debt. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 12)

BELARUS' GDP, INFLATION UP — GDP rose 4 percent in the first half of 2000 compared with the same period last year, Belapan reported on 12 July. But at the same time, consumer prices rose 45 percent during the first five months of 2000, the highest inflation rate among the countries of the CIS, Interfax-Belarus reported on the same day. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 13)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT SAYS HARVEST IS POLITICAL ISSUE — Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 27 July held his annual conference with government officials and agricultural managers to discuss the harvest campaign. Lukashenka said during the meeting, which was televised and lasted four hours, that the country expects the best harvest in the past three years, and he demanded that the collective farms fulfill all state grain purchase orders, warning that he will not take into account bad weather if the crop yield turns out to be poor. Lukashenka added that this year's harvest is a political issue. "We should avoid dependence [on foreign grain supplies] while our oppositionists are going to the Czech Republic and saying there: 'Don't give bread to the Belarusians, let them kick the bucket, so they will overthrow their Lukashenka sooner,'" Belarusian Television quoted him as saying. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 27)

BELARUSIAN OFFICIALS TO BE FIRED IF WAGE ARREARS NOT PAID — Lukashenka has threatened to fire all government and local officials as well as managers who do not repay wage arrears by the 1 September deadline he set last month (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 16 August 2000). He pledged to take this measure when he returns from this week's UN session in New York and has familiarized himself with a special commission report on the repayment of wage arrears in Belarus. "Everyone will be fired, even if this [measure] applies to 2,000 people. We do not need leaders who are today incapable of paying their workers' collectives," Belarusian Television quoted him as saying on 1 September. (RFE/RL Newsline,September 4)

BELARUS'S CENTRAL BANK SETS SINGLE RUBLE EXCHANGE RATE — The National Bank on 14 September set the official ruble exchange rate at 1,020 rubles to $1, which is virtually the same as the street exchange rate. The bank's decision ends the four-year period in which Belarus had several currency exchange rates, while the ruble's official value was as much as five times higher than its market value. Former National Bank head Stanislau Bahdankevich welcomed the bank's step to introduce a single ruble exchange rate but warned that a multiplicity of exchange rates may soon be restored if the government continues to subsidize loss-making enterprises, control prices, and "stage show actions to pay wage arrears," Belapan reported. (RFE/RL Newsline,September 14)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT PUNISHES OFFICIALS FOR FAILING TO PAY WAGE ARREARS — Alyaksandr Lukashenka has issued a decree punishing those officials who failed to pay wage arrears by 1 September, as he had earlier ordered, Belarusian Television reported on 14 September. Lukashenka fired 90 officials and ordered the Minsk Prosecutor's Office to bring to justice those officials who "deliberately provided incomplete or false information" about the payment of wage arrears.(RFE/RL Newsline,September 15)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT WARNS U.S. OVER ANTI-DUMPING SANCTIONS... — Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 15 September blasted the U.S. for a report alleging that Belarus is selling steel at dumping prices, Belarusian Television reported. Lukashenka warned that if the U.S. Department of Commerce takes anti-dumping sanctions against Belarus, Minsk will retaliate. "I want to warn the Americans: [possible sanctions] will cost them dearly here in Belarus," Lukashenka told a 500-strong crowd of steel mill workers in Zhodzina, Minsk Oblast. Lukashenka said Belarus is selling its steel abroad in a fair competition, while the U.S. are resorting to political leverage to drive rivals out of the market. The U.S. International Trade Commission submitted a report to the Department of Commerce last month accusing Belarus and several other countries of dumping steel used to reinforce concrete.(RFE/RL Newsline,September 18)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT DETERMINES 2001 GROWTH FIGURES — Alyaksandr Lukashenka has issued a decree establishing key indicators of Belarus's socioeconomic development in 2001, Belapan reported on 20 September. According to the decree, Belarus's GDP is to increase by 3-4 percent compared with this year's level, industrial and agricultural production by 4.5-5.5 percent, and foreign trade by 2.8-3.8 percent. The real income of the population is to grow 3.5-4.5 percent next year. (RFE/RL Newsline,September 21)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT SAYS COUNTRY WILL SURVIVE ON ITS OWN GRAIN — During a national harvest festival in Shklou, Mahileu Oblast, on 23 September, Alyaksandr Lukashenka said Belarus has harvested enough food and forage grain this year to manage without grain imports. "We do not ingratiate ourselves with anybody, we do not speculate with our national assets--our property. We do not bow to anyone," Belarusian Television quoted him as saying. This year's crop of 4.9 million tons of grain was well below Soviet-era results but was a significant improvement on last year's 3.6 million tons. Lukashenka canceled the 1999 national harvest festival, which was also planned to take place in Shklou, his hometown. (RFE/RL Newsline,September 21)

SHARP GASOLINE, UTILITY PRICE INCREASES IN BELARUS — The Belarusian government announced a 10 percent hike in the price of gasoline on 26 September, the fourth increase since August. This makes gasoline in Belarus the most expensive among neighboring CIS states, Belapan reported. One liter of diesel in Belarus now costs $0.36, while in Moldova a liter costs $0.32, in Ukraine $0.27, and in Russia $0.21. Meanwhile, since August average utility rates have risen 80 percent for hot water and 21 percent for building maintenance and upkeep. (RFE/RL Newsline,September 28)

BELARUS TO START LEVYING TARIFFS ON GOODS TRANSITING RUSSIA — Vladimir Goshin, deputy chairman of the State Customs Committee, has announced that on 1 October Belarus will begin levying duties on imports from Russia that originate in other countries, Belapan reported on 28 September. Goshin said the measure is in response to a similar regulation instituted by Russia some six months ago. He added that Russia began conducting "full-scale" customs inspections of all goods imported from Belarus on 22 September. Goshin said the new regulations by Minsk will neither require new customs checkpoints on the border nor lead to an increase in customs officers. (RFE/RL Newsline,September 29)

BELARUSIAN LEGISLATURE ADOPTS 2001 BUDGET IN FIRST READING — The Chamber of Representatives on 3 October passed the 2001 budget in the first reading. The bill projects consolidated revenues at 5.7 trillion Belarusian rubles ($5.5 billion), with a deficit totaling $238 million (1.5 percent of GDP). According to Finance Minister Mikalay Korbut, who presented the budget draft to the legislature, 77 percent of the planned revenues are to be spent in the social sphere. "We will without fail carry out the requirement of the president and the people to raise wages," RFE/RL's Belarusian Service quoted Premier Uladzimir Yarmoshyn as saying. President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has ordered his ministers to double the current monthly average wage to $100 by fall 2001. (RFE/RL Newsline, October 4)

MEDIA WATCH

Belarusian Opposition Aims for Unity in Fight Against Łukašenka (*Lidove Noviny - Prague*, July 27, 2000)

Mysterious disappearances and even untimely deaths are commonplace in Belarus when it comes to regime's opponents.

MINSK. The Belarusian opposition is attempting to forge a miracle: unify all its forces to create a single bloc against Europe's worst dictator — Alaksandr Łukašenka.

.... It is remaining steadfast in its decision to boycott the parliamentary elections scheduled for October 15 unless four conditions are met. In particular, the opposition demands that the authorities give it access to the state run electronic media, create a favorable political climate in the country, provide Parliament with meaningful functions and bring electoral legislation in line with international standards. (The present Belarusian parliament is a rubber-stamp institution not recognized by the international community. There is no balance of power; the president's authority is unchallenged and he rules by decree).

None of the four conditions have to date been adequately met. In all likelihood, therefore, only pro-Łukašenka forces will take part in the elections.

Another issue uniting the Belarusian opposition is its condemnation of the climate of fear that dominates in the country. The regime's critics are subject to constant repressions. Its most significant opponents have either disappeared without a trace or died under suspicious circumstances. The former interior minister Jury Zacharanka, for example, vanished in May of last year — as did Viktar Hančar, the speaker of the disbanded parliament, and his friend Jury Krasouski. Tamara Vinnikava, the former head of the Central Bank, was missing for several months but surfaced in London early this year. In subsequent interviews, Vinnikava has intimated that opposition leader Hienadz Karpienka, who apparently succumbed to a stroke last year, was actually a victim of murder. As recently as a month ago, a Belarusian cameraman for Russia's ORT television, Zmicier Zavadzki, joined the ranks of the disappeared.

Most of the opposition is also united in its rejection of Łukašenka's efforts to have Belarus join the Russian Federation. It is concerned that the Belarusian nation, already decimated by decades of Soviet rule, might lose its national identity in a merger with Russia and another loss of political sovereignty. "Belarusians feel close to Western democracy. We do not want to unite with Russia, a country that does not respect human rights," declared Vincuk Viačorka, chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF), the country's leading opposition party. (Other main parties in the opposition are the United Civic Party, the Social-Democrats and the Conservative Christians — as well as independent trade unions and human rights organizations like Viasna 96 and Charter 97.)

The economic situation in Belarus is also bleak. Inflation reaches catastrophic heights; the monthly wage has fallen to below $30. Discontent is rampant, especially in the cities. What was unimaginable only a year ago, is now a daily reality: a large percentage of Minsk residents openly vilifies the dictator in public.

Still, Łukašenka holds all the cards. His enormous police apparatus effectively stifles any mass protests that the opposition is able to organize. Tens of thousands of participants at such rallies are routinely and brutally dispersed by truncheon-wilding special forces.

Twin moods of apathy and fear prevail in the country — and with good reason: Belarus has perhaps the largest network of secret police agents of any other country. It is still known as KGB and is built on the principles created by Soviet secret police founder Feliks Dziaržynski. Not surprisingly, a monument to this ignominious figure still dominates the courtyard of KGB headquarters in Minsk.

Is Lukashenka's Number Up? (*The Economist*, "Colonel Beats Major," September 9, 2000)

According to the title of this unsigned article, Russian President Vladimir Putin, former lieutenant colonel of the KGB, "shows little respect, it seems" for Belarusian President Alaksandr Lukashenka, former major of the KGB-run border guards. This was noted, according to the article, by the body language when the two men met in Minsk in April.

President Boris Yeltsin, the article says, was indulgent toward Alexander Lukashenka and supplied Belarus with cheap energy. Belarus, in turn, became a willing front for Russia in selling arms, joined Russia in a military pact to counter NATO, and has been serving as a model for integration between Russia and other post-Soviet countries.

In this respect, Russia still needs Belarus. "But does Russia need Mr. Lukashenka?" asks the article. "Not so much." According to some opposition leaders, Lukashenka was a "puppet of Russia's hard men" and now has become an embarrassment. "A more predictable figure . . . , such as the [current] prime minister [of Belarus], Vladimir Yermoshin, might now suit the Kremlin better."

Russia can influence next year's presidential election in Belarus if it wishes, says the article. It could refuse to roll over debt or supply energy and spares. And Russian television, which most Belarusians prefer, could undermine him as it did Putin's opponents in Russia. But, so far, Lukashenka has been able to go on tightening his grip.

Belarus' cowed people show little appetite for protest theses days, says the article. Lukashenka has more than enough means to repress them. "But his real problem is more likely to come from Moscow than from Minsk. If Mr. Putin were to decide that Mr. Lukashenka's number was up, that would probably be that."

LETTERS

No Closure of OSCE Mission in Belarus

In your most recent edition, Professor David R. Marples addressed the question: " Is it time for the OSCE to pull out of Belarus?" (THOUGHTS and OBSERVATIONS). Professor Marples suggests to admit failure and to pull out —"in honors" so to speak. I can assure him that I do not have any plans to suggest closure of the mission because of possible lack of success in connection with the upcoming elections. I am unaware of any desire of the Chairperson-in-Office to do so because of possible setbacks.

Democratic institutions do not come over night, and a setback should not be a cause of the neighborhood in Europe to resign and give up. This may be a theoretical option for someone observing developments in Eastern Europe from the far distance.

Let me also point out to the readers of the *Belarusian Review* that the strategy and policy pursued by this OSCE mission is supported by the OSCE membership at large, and by all relevant European institutions, such as the Council of Europe and the European Parliament, as well as the European Commission and the European Council. It is strange to hear from someone who is familiar with transatlantic structures and European institutions to associate the policy of dialogue pursued in Belarus with a particular country and the diplomatic representative of that country in Belarus. It is bizarre to attach more than a casual significance to the fact that the head of the Advisory and Monitoring Group happens to be a German. Such "mental constructions," however, can lead the readers to wrong conclusions — and perhaps the author wanted to achieve exactly that.

It may be that the Lukashenko government will close the mission — to the disadvantage of Belarus and to the emerging pluralistic civil society and multiple political structure in existence in Belarus now, though under difficult conditions. The Lukashenko government has played with this idea for some time already, and it has an ally for such plans on the extreme right wing of the political spectrum: Z.. Paznyak and his Christian Conservative Party are pleading for the closure of the mission as well. There was and there is no timetable for the accomplishment of this task — namely to assist in the development of democratic institutions, and to monitor the compliance of the country with its international obligations. European and Transatlantic Institutions should have an interest in the continued pursuit of the peaceful solution of the subdued constitutional crisis. The presence of Western institutions in Belarus was reduced because of the constitutional crisis. The OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group was one — if not the one institution — that could operate rather freely in support of democratic groups in many walks of life and in many regions. Such work at the grassroots level cannot be done from the outside and not on the basis of fundamentalist positions.

Whoever suggests closing the mission must have in mind to install another strategy for the development of democratic institutions or he wants to abandon this effort in favor of democratic structures altogether. The promoters of a strategy of change brought about by way of massive street demonstrations feel apparently embarrassed by the dialogue concept of OSCE in general and of the Advisory and Monitoring Group in particular. I warn of any attempt to abandon the concept of peaceful solution by meaningful roundtables! Neither is it likely that the alternative, "forceful" strategy can be more successful, nor will and can it contribute to the strengthening of a pluralistic civil society and pluralistic political system.

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